OUR EMOTIONAL GOD

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An In-Depth Look at the Emotional Side
and Personality of God

When God made man in His own image (Genesis 1:26), He gave us the ability to have the same basic emotions that He has – the ability to laugh when we are happy, to cry when we are sad, to become angry when things go wrong, to be jealous when someone is unfaithful and to love when we are loved.

What are Emotions?

Emotions and feelings are impulses from within us that move us toward action. Emotions are what drive us to do the things we do. When our emotions are controlled we do what is right and if they're not we do what we feel like. Among the emotions are such feelings or expressions as fear, anger, resentment, jealousy, hatred, grief, sorrow, surprise, desire, elation and joy.

There is nothing wrong with emotions by and of themselves. It’s how we use those emotions that can be good or bad. Unfortunately a lot of us allow ourselves to act thoughtlessly on impulse. As a result we get swayed and buffeted into all sorts of troubles, tragedies and sufferings through our irrational actions.

Emotional maturity is where we don't just react purely on how we feel. It's where we control our emotions and only act in a way where it's for the good of others and ourselves, not at others’ expense regardless of how we feel. One who is emotionally mature controls his emotions rather than letting their emotions control them.

The Greeks put it well when they said that emotions must be ruled by reason and, just as important, they also said that reason must be warmed by emotion.

The original series of the popular science fiction show “Star Trek” was built around this tension between emotion and logic that we all go through. Mr Spock, from the planet Vulcan, represented pure logic, free of all emotion, while the passionate Dr McCoy (a.k.a. Bones) wore his emotions on his shirt sleeves. Captain Kirk realized the value of both emotions and logic in making right choices. He listened to both sides of their arguments balancing Spock's logic with Bones’ emotions in order to make right command decisions.

In the movie “Star Trek 2” Mr Spock gives his life to save the life of the whole crew in a crisis situation. As he's dying he tells Captain Kirk a Vulcan quote - “the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one.”

In “Star Trek 3” Captain Kirk's crew go to extraordinary lengths to re-unite Spock's “living soul” housed temporarily in Dr McCoy with Spock's regenerated body on the experimental Genesis planet. After body and soul are re-united on planet Vulcan, Spock asks Kirk why they all went to such lengths to do this for him. Kirk's answer was that “the needs of the one outweigh the needs of the many”. Their actions were quite reminiscent of the Musketeers motto “One for all and all for one” and helped to illustrate that we need to take both logic and our emotions into account when we make decisions on how we should act.
Though it was Spock’s cold logic that saved the Enterprise who knows how many times, I’m glad that I’m not a Vulcan - I want to feel life!

Herbert Armstrong writes the following about emotional maturity:

Emotional maturity does not mean emotion-less maturity. The truly emotionally mature control their emotions. They do not anesthetize them! They express, at the right time, and in proper degree, enthusiasm, happiness, joy. They feel deep gratitude for blessings, and also they deeply feel reverence and adoration in their worship of the great God who created everything. They sincerely feel compassion toward others and extend outgoing concern for others by the way they treat others.

Emotional maturity does not crucify emotions - it controls and guides them with right knowledge and true wisdom. Emotional maturity develops hand-in-hand with physical, mental and spiritual growth - the four blending, finally, into the perfect spiritual character which is the true human destiny and the very purpose of life. It can bring very great and rewarding and lasting happiness (Good News, April 1986, p.17).

**Our Perfect Role Model**

Our goal is to become “perfect, just as [our] Father in heaven is perfect” (*Matthew 5:48*). God is our perfect example of how to control our emotions. By studying how He has controlled His emotions we can get a better understanding of how we can control our emotions. By studying His word we can gain a deeper understanding of what God is really like and how He has felt during the highs and lows of His great eternal existence.

The Macquarie Dictionary defines personality as someone’s distinctive and notable personal characteristics. We all have different personalities – some of us are lively and extroverted, others are quiet and unassuming. Some are talented and love sports while others are musically gifted. All of us have different likes and dislikes, talents and abilities and different styles of speech and writing. There is no one with your exact combination of likes and dislikes, talents and abilities. The great God of the Universe also has His own unique personality.

A person’s character – their moral capacity and inclination for acting rightly or wrongly – is only a part of that person's personality. Also included as a part of a person's personality are their likes and dislikes, talents, style of living, speaking and writing and their personal idiosyncrasies. This applies to God as well. He has His own distinct personality that includes much more than just His great character.

Many articles and books have been written that have focused on God’s great power and His great love and character. In this book we will explore God's emotions and the highs and lows of God’s great eternal existence and look at how He has or may have felt during those times. We will also learn what we can about His own distinct personality traits. In short, this book will be, kind of like, a biography of God Himself.

**In the Beginning**

So, with that as introduction, let’s now wind the clock back to the beginning of time to a time when there was only God! Herbert Armstrong in his book “The Incredible Human Potential” describes it this way:

If one should ask, where do you find the actual beginning of events in the Bible, most who possess even a slight knowledge of the world's "best seller" would say, "why in Genesis chapter one verse one, of course." WRONG!
The real beginning, in order of time sequence, is found in the New Testament, in the first chapter of John, verse one. The events portrayed in Genesis occurred later -- possibly even millions of years later. But the event recorded in John 1:1 reveals an existence perhaps long prior to the time God created the earth and the material universe.

Note it: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." It continues, "The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." The term "all things" is translated in Hebrews 1:3, in the Moffatt translation, as "the UNIVERSE." The entire UNIVERSE was made by Him!

The fourteenth verse of John 1 says: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." The Personage called the Word was the one who ultimately -- yet more than 1900 years ago -- was born Jesus Christ. The name, "the Word," is translated from the original Greek text, and means, literally, just what is translated into English - "Spokesman."

Originally there existed only these two Spirit Personages, self-existent. They had creative powers -- they had perfect supreme minds -- they possessed perfect, holy and righteous CHARACTER. But THERE WAS NONE ELSE -- NOTHING ELSE! There was no matter -- no material universe -- YET! No other living being or thing. Only these two, equal in mind and powers, except that God was supreme in authority, and the Word in perfect harmony under that authority...There were these two Supreme Beings. Alone! In the emptiness of space! No other life forms -- no other living beings! Nothing else! But they possessed MINDS of supreme capacity. And, much, much later, they created humans after their own likeness and image. They endowed MAN with the power of MIND.

It seems obvious that human minds were made to function in the same manner as the Creator's, although in an inferior way. But how do we humans use our minds? We are endowed with something akin to creative powers. Man produces buildings out of existing materials. Man has produced intricate machines. But how? Man thinks it out -- makes plans -- before the actual making.

As an illustration: After much prayer about it to learn God's will, I was allowed to build the finest modern auditorium on this earth -- the Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena, California. But I did much thinking and planning -- I engaged the largest and best firm of architects and engineers in the world to design my general idea of such an edifice into finished PLANNING. We were twelve years thinking out, designing, and putting into actual plans and blueprints this Auditorium before even breaking ground. Every cubic inch of the Auditorium was designed on paper before a single cubic inch went into production.

How much more, then, must the Great God and the Word have thought out, planned, and designed in their minds, before the actual Creation?

They did not create matter first. The laws and facts of radioactivity tell us with certainty that there was a time when such matter did not exist. But the Great God through the Word first designed and created SPIRIT BEINGS -- angels, each individually created -- millions or perhaps even billions of them! They were composed wholly of Spirit. They were given self-containing life -- life inherent -- immortality. But also God created within them MINDS -- with power to think, to reason, to make choices and decisions! (p.34-37).

In the beginning there were these two spirit beings with almighty power and perfect, holy righteous character. They lived the way of GIVE. They were kind and generous, always at peace and in perfect
harmony. They had no selfishness whatsoever. They lived the way of love, of giving and sharing. They had life inherent within them, not like you and I, and they wanted to **SHARE** that life. They decided somewhere that they wanted to share life. They wanted more beings. They wanted to be able to talk with these beings. They wanted to fellowship, to work together, to have a diversity of beings that would dwell in peace and harmony - to have a family to live in joyous unity. But they didn't want someone that would spoil the nest.

They didn't want some selfish, self-willed or arrogant person. They didn't want some contentious, touchy, critical, self-exalting type of person or some angry, irritable, grouchy type of person. They wanted to have co-operative, humble beings who are pleasant to be with and are gracious and kind to enjoy fellowshipping with and to enjoy their viewpoints because different minds look at things differently and it's fascinating. God wanted to have beings with different viewpoints and experiences to share their company and even wisdom with.

God knew that if He wanted to have harmony He would have to have givers, not getters. He would have to have beings of a similar nature who would always respect the Father, first of all, and also would respect their fellow beings and have their welfare in mind, who would be helpful and co-operative and considerate just like God. After He would create the universe He wanted to have a **FAMILY** of immortals to share it with. Herbert Armstrong in his book "Mystery of the Ages" describes God this way:

"God is Creator of all - of everything in the vast Universe - the stars, the galaxies in endless space, this earth, man, and everything in the earth. That is what God is - what He does. He creates! He designs, forms, and shapes. He gives life! He is the great giver. And His law - His way of life - is the way of giving, not getting which is the way of this world...

"God the Father is Creator. But he 'created all things by Jesus Christ' [Ephesians 3:9] Jesus is the Word. It is written, 'He spake, and it was done' (Psalm 33:9). God tells Christ what to do (John 8:28-29). Jesus then speaks, as the workman, and the Holy Spirit is the POWER that responds and does what Jesus commands...

"Two can't walk together except they be agreed. They were in total agreement and cooperation. Also two can't walk together in continuous peace except one be the head, or leader in control. God [the Father] was leader. Their way of life produced perfect peace, cooperation, happiness, accomplishment. This way of life became a law.

"Law is a code of conduct, or relationship, between two or more. One might call the rules of a sports contest the 'law' of the game. The presence of law requires a penalty for infraction. There can be no law without a penalty for its violation. The very fact of law presupposes government. Government is the administration and enforcement of law by one in authority. This necessitates authoritative leadership - one in command [God the Father](p.33, 36, 40)".

**Angels**

In their usual spiritual shape angels look quite different to both man and God in appearance. Most have many wings and some have multiple faces which include the face of animals (Ezekiel 1:4-14, Isaiah 6:1-3). They look quite different to God's image in their usual spirit form and they were created to be God's servants (Hebrews 1:14). At the resurrection we will be on a level above the angels (1 Corinthians 6:2-3) even though they have been around a lot longer than us lowly human beings and they are a lot more powerful at this time.
"To illustrate the primary activity of God's angels today, we might consider the status of the young son of a wealthy man. While still a child, he may be under the care of an adult servant or guardian designated by his father. The servant is older, farther advanced in knowledge, much more developed physically and mentally—but far lower potentially. For when the son is mature, he will inherit his father's wealth and power. Therefore the servant, older and more mature, is only a servant 'ministering' to the young 'heir.' Likewise, angels are ministering to spirit-begotten humans today" (Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course – Lesson 14, p.13).

While the angels were not created in God's image which resembles the shape and form of man they are sentient beings with minds of their own and their own unique personalities. What would it have been like when God brought these angels into being? Imagine God's joy to have these beings to talk to and share life with. There must have been great joy and a feeling of great accomplishment when He created these magnificent looking beings who He could share life with.

Of his anointed cherub, Lucifer, who was one of the cherubs at the very throne of God Himself God said, "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created" (Ezekiel 28:12-13).

As far as talent, intelligence and beauty goes this cherub was as magnificent as God could create. Many of us are in awe when we come into the presence of special individuals with incredible talent, intelligence or beauty. Some people just ooze talent and charisma. These angels had all of these kind of special qualities. God must have felt great pride, joy and pleasure to have created such wonderful beings and thoroughly enjoyed what they had to offer in companionship. Perhaps these angels (like the 24 elders at the throne of God – Revelation 5) assisted in the creating of ideas and the planning that God developed in creating the material universe.

The Creation of the Material Universe

What a stupendous undertaking it must have been to create the entire universe with its billions and billions of stars and planets! In Genesis 1:1 we read: "In the beginning God created the heaven[s] and the earth." John D. Barrow in his book "The Origin of the Universe" writes:

"[Hubble's discovery of our expanding universe] was the greatest discovery of twentieth-century science, and it confirmed what Einstein's general theory of relativity had predicted about the universe: that it cannot be static. The gravitational attraction between the galaxies would bring them all together if they were not rushing away from each other. The universe can't stand still. If the universe is expanding, then when we reverse the direction of history and look in the past we should find evidence that it emerged from a smaller, denser state - a state that appears to have once had zero size. It is this apparent beginning that has become known as the big bang."

Imagine this grand moment of creation and how God must have felt after planning it for aeons when He created the universe in one stupendous, well-planned BIG BANG! Imagine God organizing the course of these emerging galaxies and all the effort that He put into creating all these incredible stars and planets and beautiful nebula over the millions of years it would take fashioning them and guiding their orderly course in the heavens. The Hubble telescope is giving us some magnificent glimpses of the wonder and design and beauty of these magnificent heavenly bodies and nebulas out there. As the great Architect of it all and great Artist of this beauty and wonder He must have felt tremendous joy and accomplishment at all that He had created.
Some time after the Big Bang and a certain degree of the universe's expansion there still existed only inanimate matter – no physical life as yet. While we have no idea of knowing for sure, there is the possibility that earth is the prototype planet where physical life was first created in the universe. The angels may well have for several aeons been involved with God in the actual creation of the physical universe in this early stage when there was no physical life as yet. This may have been the time that Lucifer acted as the covering cherub in God's administration at the throne of God. The next part of the plan of God for the universe would see Lucifer given a transfer to our little corner of the universe.

The Creation of the Earth

Now would come the creation of planet Earth and the beginning of life. God tells us a little about the initial creation of Earth in his rebuke to God in Job 38:4-7 where He says: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

The angels didn't just speak joyfully – they SHOUTED for joy! It blew them away how magnificent it was when God created it. A glimpse of what it must have been like at this time can be seen by going to the IMAX film "Blue Planet". With the large, panoramic view one can't help but be awestruck with the beauty of the Earth from space with its blue oceans and magnificent continents ranging from green forests to orange deserts, sprinkled with bright white clouds and teeming with life everywhere. Compared to the other planets in the solar system the earth really is quite magnificent.

God must have been every bit as delighted as the angels were when He created and fashioned planet Earth. Unlike the "re-creation" that is recorded in Genesis 1 from verse 2 on that occurred 6000 years ago, the process of putting life on the Earth initially appears to have been a lot more gradual according to the record of nature.

Lucifer and His Angels Assigned to the Earth

"God assigns angels responsibilities, but God created within them MINDS -- WITH POWER TO THINK, TO REASON, TO MAKE CHOICES AND DECISIONS! But there was one super-important quality that even God's creative powers could not create instantly by fiat -- the same perfect, holy, righteous CHARACTER inherent in both God and the Word! This kind of character must be DEVELOPED, by the CHOICE and the INTENT of the one in whom it comes to exist."

As a training ground to help them develop God's character and learn to co-operate with God and His plans and co-operate with each other, Lucifer and a great number of the angels were put on earth. Herbert W. Armstrong in "Mystery of the Ages" wrote that:

"God intended the angels to add their own workmanship to the earth's surface. He intended them to work over the surface of the earth, to improve it, to embellish it, beautify it -- in other words 'put the icing on the cake'" (p.64-65).

Lucifer was put in charge of the angels (Isaiah 14:12-14) who were involved in this fantastic project of helping to develop this living prototype planet. Lucifer was very intelligent and powerful and, in time, this power and intelligence went to his head. He became full of pride and vanity (Ezekiel 28, Revelation 12).

In Isaiah 14:13 he said "I will exalt my throne". God had given him authority and where did God give him that authority? Notice that he also said "I will ascend above the clouds" (Isaiah 14:13). God had given him rule on this earth for a particular reason. As time went by during this phase of developing life on Earth, Lucifer and most of the angels under Him rebelled against God's rule and law.
Herman Hoeh in a series of sermons that he presented on the world before Adam around 1978 gives us these thoughts about what he believes Lucifer and his angels were doing on earth before Adam and Eve and how they ended up rebelling. These are his own thoughts based on inferences in the Bible and the record of nature. This is probably the most sound explanation as to what the angels were doing prior to Adam and Eve that we can come up with until God chooses to reveal it all after Christ's return.

We have taught that angels were on earth before Adam, being trained. What was their primary function? To rule trees and rocks and streams? What were they given experience in? More than merely ruling over each other. We should expand our former concepts and see that they were on earth to govern in a small way (as an opportunity to learn and to prove they could be trusted) before being sent out further into the universe. Their role on earth should be seen as equipping or qualifying them to rule in the universe. This means they were governing nature in great detail...This is what they were asked to govern—not a barren world, but a world full of life forms throughout geologic history. The Church has a responsibility to teach the role of angels in the world before Adam...

We do not see a world of which we could say that God was 'experimenting'--that term has overtones that could be misunderstood. I would prefer the concept that God was 'developing' a creation in which angels were being challenged and tested on how they would carry out God's government in guiding that nature, and in ruling over ever more complex forms of life...

The world today from nature is not a reflection of the kind of government God intended to be exercised by the angels throughout nature. It is, in fact, a reflection of the Devil's idea of competition, of devouring, and keeping in balance by each thing competing with something else.

Now Mr Armstrong long ago conceived of the idea of competition as being the lifeblood both of our economy and business and society and government. He said this is, as far as he is concerned, the fundamental characteristic of the Devil's philosophy...

As God started out He said: 'I want to make sure the creation reflects the spirit of love, and it's going to be a beautiful world. We are not going to have competition. Therefore the pattern of nutrition and the pattern of birth will not need to have competition to keep everything in that order we see it in.' [We could also add diseases and viruses and so on.] Can you imagine a World Tomorrow in which mice reproduce at the present rate with no cats to catch the mouse? What would happen if we took away predators and left the birth rate the same? [In the World Tomorrow [Isaiah 11:6]] we see the whole of nature is going to change, both in terms of what an animal eats and in terms of the reproductive systems, because they are all tied together....

The Devil may have gone so far with certain things, and he may have wanted to change certain things, but then God also may have said 'Well look, I want a change. I want certain new life forms to be produced. I will see what you will do with them'...Now presumably not more than a third of the angels followed the Devil. The other two thirds profited by the experience and took no part in the spirit of competition as developed in the biological world...

It does take some time for some people to poison other peoples minds and it takes time, as Mr Armstrong said, for the Devil to persuade angels, who were greater in knowledge by far than human beings. And the Devil was going back and forth, and he kept arguing with God over the necessity of the creation being patterned after a different philosophy than God's. But God never listened, and the Devil always came back and told the angels that 'God never
listened’, just as ‘Mr Armstrong never listened’ - you’ve heard that. Well God never listened to the Devil either...

Apparently all this time God allowed the Devil the chance to see whether after he had examined the nature that he was governing (or abusing - whatever term you want to use), whether he would change or whether he would not. They finally came to the point, as Mr Armstrong said, where spirits apparently do set their character, and you can go only so far in the realm of spirit until your attitude so poisons you that it can never be altered [Mr Armstrong used the analogy of the angels’ character being like concrete which can be changed for a time while it’s wet before it sets permanently].

In a seminar that author Stephen Collins participated in, he made this interesting comment:

“I believe that we see in the progression of the dinosaurs a gradual testimony to Lucifer’s degeneration. It goes from peaceful herbivores [in the Triassic era] then bringing in smaller predators [in the Jurassic era]. Then in the Cretaceous you have large, armoured herbivores and predators who could fight each other followed by the dinosaurs extinction.”

How true all of this is we will only really find out when God chooses to inform us of what happened back then. For the most part, God chooses to reveal information to us on the spirit world on a need to know basis so there is still a lot about the spirit world that remains a mystery to us.

Lucifer Turns to the Dark Side

How must God have felt as He watched Satan gradually well up with pride and vanity and rebel against Him? Perhaps He felt just like David when he wrote in Psalm 55: “Destruction is in its midst. Oppression and deceit do not depart from its streets. For it is not an enemy who reproaches me then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng” (verses 11-14).

This must have been a painful time slowly watching Lucifer’s attitude get more and more poisoned and watching him spread lies about Him to the other angels under His control and then watching them side with Lucifer. Some of the splits that have occurred in church and other organizations give us a glimpse of the kind of things that must have went on and been said at this time.

Lucifer thought he could run the universe better than God and tried to take over God’s throne and rule the universe. His rebellion failed and he was cast back down to earth. In Luke 10:18 Jesus said: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” How must He have felt watching this happen? The kind of power unleashed in this battle where Lucifer, now Satan [the adversary], tried to overthrow God’s throne would have been incredible.

Genesis 1:1 shows the creation of a perfect earth. Genesis 1:2 shows the result of the sin and destruction of the angels. "And the earth [became] without form and void". The words "without form and void" are translated from the Hebrew words "tohu" and “bohu”. Those Hebrew words can also be translated as "waste and empty" or "chaotic and in a state of decay".

“What had long been a beautiful planet had been turned into a cosmic wreck because Lucifer rebelled against his maker. The atmosphere was filled with smoke and poison gases so thick that nothing could live in it...Little or no physical life could survive through that terrible time...For a time our world stayed buried in a deep blanket of gases, smoke and water. Oceans covered the whole Earth. There was no longer any dry land. The atmosphere was so clogged with clouds of tiny bits of matter that no light could reach the seas” (The Bible Story, Volume 1, p.5-6).
It's possible this global catastrophe may have been around the time that Lucifer tried to overthrow God's throne in heaven (Isaiah 14:12-14). Maybe part of his motivation for lashing out and destroying what was on the earth at this time was the knowledge that God was about to begin the next phase of his great plan. Jealousy may have burned in his heart knowing that the “puny” mortal beings God was about to create in His own image would one day inherit all things and rule over everything that He wanted to control.

God Renews the Earth After Satan's Destruction

While it must have deeply saddened God to see Lucifer turn to the Dark Side God must have been pleased with the other two-thirds plus of the angels who stayed faithful to Him. Those who had faithfully chosen to live by God's way would serve God in the next project that God had planned from the beginning of time – that of REPRODUCING HIMSELF!

Genesis 1 is an absolutely beautiful, poetic description of that week when God re-created a whole myriad of new life on this planet some 6 000 years ago. Every ancient people had their own story about how the world was created. These have come to be called creation myths and are full of bizarre ideas with multiple gods fighting each other. Is Genesis 1 just another creation myth that borrowed ideas from other creation myths of the Babylonians or the Egyptians? Comparing the Bible to other creation myths, astrophysicist Hugh Ross wrote:

"The [Bible's] distinctives struck me immediately. It was simple, direct and specific...Instead of just another bizarre creation myth, here was a journal-like record of the earth's initial conditions – correctly described from the standpoint of astrophysics and geophysics – followed by a summary of the sequence of changes through which Earth came to be inhabited by living things and ultimately by humans. The account was simple, elegant and scientifically accurate” (The Creator and the Cosmos, p.15).

Ron Dart in an article entitled "I'll Make Me a World" presents a beautiful commentary of this wonderful re-creation of planet Earth. He wrote:

And God stepped out on space
And He looked around and said:
I'm lonely—
I'll make me a world.

From "The Creation," James Weldon Johnson.

"Once upon a time, there was no world. There was no universe as we know it. There was only space. There was a time when God arrived at a decision to create the world—when the world was born in the mind of God.

"Before there could be a man, there had to be a place for man and that place had to be carefully designed. Man would be physical, so his environment had to be physical. He would need food, air, water, a survivable temperature range. He would need companionship, animal and human, and the opportunity to grow and develop. All this took thought and planning. And so the planning began. A planet would be required— and power...

“First of all we will need a star. The star will have to be big enough to be far away and still provide light, warmth and power. Too close, and we might fry our man with radiation.
Too far, and he can't grow food. The star needs to be big enough to have sufficient fuel to last over time. We want it to remain stable for as long as we need it.

"We must give careful consideration to the quality of the radiation from this star. Part of the radiation will fall in the visible range and will be called light. Light must have certain properties to be useful. Unlike ultraviolet and X-rays, it must not be harmful. X-rays will go right through tissue and cause damage. Light will simply be reflected from the skin and will be harmless. Yet light must penetrate the atmosphere, while X-rays must be absorbed. A nice little problem in physics must be solved.

"Since man will be able to see, we want him to like what he sees. For that matter, we want to like it ourselves. If we make different frequencies of light different colors, and vary the qualities of absorption, diffusion, refraction, and reflection, we can get rainbows, red sunsets, green leaves, yellow lemons, blue skies, and blue-green water. What we can do with flowers and birds is only limited by our imagination.

"The planet we have in mind will have to be 93 million miles from the selected star—no more, no less. This will give it the optimum climate. Our man will have to grow food, and the food will have to be watered. At 93 million miles, the sun will evaporate and raise about 5,435 tons of water from one square mile of ocean surface every hour. The temperature differential, and the weight of water vapor should serve to get the water to high altitudes and keep it there long enough for the wind to carry it over land. If we cool it at the right time, it should serve as an effective sprinkler system.

"The planet will have to be just the right size. If it is too large, gravity will make everything heavier. It will hold more oxygen and more oxygen will mean more water. A much larger planet could have oceans that are 1500 miles deep. If we make it too small, it won't hold the lighter gases at all. There is, it seems a rather narrow range of size for this planet we want.

"We can also see that one side of it will be too hot and the other side too cold. We can handle that by simply turning it on its axis. We must, however, get the speed of rotation right. Our man can get used to days of varying lengths, but if we turn too slow, we burn everything up in the days and freeze it at night.

"Even with the planet spinning, there is still a problem. The equator will be too hot, with perpetual summer, and the northern latitudes will be too cold to be useful. What if we tilt the earth a few degrees? This will give us seasons, and much more of the earth can be cultivated. The cycles of heat and cold will help keep the insects under control. A 23 degree tilt should be optimum. If we vary much at all, life won't survive...

"By the way, the evaporation we have been talking about will make the oceans saline. What will that do to marine life? And how will our fish breathe? Simple. We make oxygen soluble in water. Plankton, tides, waves, rain, surface absorption will all oxygenate the water. We will equip our fish with gills that will take the oxygen directly from the water.

"What are tides? Well, we have to move these huge oceans to keep them from getting stagnant. We will put a satellite around the earth at precisely the right distance, and its gravity will pull the oceans toward it. The tides will move with the moon. The moon will also give man a sense of the passage of time.

"Fresh water poses several problems. By all our laws, fluids become more dense as they get colder. Cold water will be heavier than warm water. Lakes and rivers will freeze from the bottom up and will become solid ice. Fish cannot survive that. What if we make an
exception to our general law? What if we design the water molecule so it is heaviest a few degrees above freezing—say, four degrees centigrade? Water would sink as it gets colder until it reaches four degrees. Then, as it gets close to freezing, it will start to rise. We will get two things from this. Ice will float and form a barrier between the air above and the water below. Deep water will never freeze. We will also ‘turn over’ our lakes twice a year moving oxygen to the deeper waters so the deep water fish can survive.

"By the way, there is something else we can do with water. When it is in clouds and begins to condense, if we give water crystalline qualities, we can create little flakes of ice crystals—snow. With the right properties of random crystal development, we can make every snowflake different, no matter how close you look. And we can make them pretty. Snow can be used to store water during the cold seasons, and let it run down the mountains forming creeks and springs during the summer—a perpetual supply of cold clear water. Not bad at all. In fact, it is very good!

"Now let’s give a little thought to the reproductive cycle of pine trees...’

"The Bible tells us that God said, ‘Let there be light, and there was light.’ I suppose we could assume that was all there was to it—that God only wanted ‘light,’ and didn’t especially care what form it took or what its characteristics might be. But that idea is absurd on the face of it. Are we to believe that God just ‘lucked into’ gorgeous sunsets?

"The entire creation account is presented to us as though God merely spoke the word and it was done. But the evidence of thought and planning leaps at us from every corner of creation. There is attention to every detail. There is artistic beauty worked into what could just as easily have been drab and uninteresting. There is engineering of the highest order. There is even comedy. Creatures seem to have been deliberately designed in ways to confound those who would try to ignore the architect, the engineer, the designer, the creator.

"There is no way for the human mind to comprehend the work that went into the planning and execution of this world. No detail was too small to escape attention. No engineering problem could be left unsolved.

"There came a point in the planning process, for example, when God decided He would put flying birds in the air around this planet. This required some thought. Principles of aeronautical engineering were involved. Any student pilot knows that nothing flies unless the laws of aerodynamics are obeyed. Lift, thrust, and drag are the basics, and from there, we have to think about weight and balance, the effect of control surfaces, fuel and fuel storage, transition from high speed flight to slow to hover, power to weight ratios, navigation, landing gear, sensory systems, and control systems. If it is a bird instead of a plane, we can add biological systems for reproduction, neuromuscular control, and worm processing.

"Everyone knows that God is a ‘Creator,’ but few seem to consider what that means—that God is an engineer, a scientist, an artist, an architect, a designer, and a builder. No one grasps how much planning and painstaking care was taken with all the little problems of physics, chemistry, electronics, hydraulics, optics, and biology that faced the creator of all this.

"Think about the wings of birds. They had to be strong, but very light. Man invented aluminium and titanium to solve this problem. God solved it with hollow bones. Man has covered wings with fabric and metal. Skin was too heavy if used to provide all the lifting area required for the wings of a bird, so God used feathers. And to keep the feathers from
flying apart, He invented microscopic hooks to hold them together. With no respect at all for God’s patent, we copied it and called it Velcro.

“Airlines pay artists to design distinctive paint schemes for their aircraft. It was the artist in the Creator that designed the decorations of birds. Some species of bird would need protective coloring, but not all. Birds can fly, they can roost in trees far from the reach of most predators, so the Artist decided to make them beautiful. It was done a thousand different ways, and given the capacity for random development into a thousand new ways.

“Then there were the animals. There were millions of details to consider and no detail was too insignificant to warrant attention. Even the neurological systems of dogs and cats had to include the ability for dogs to shake off water and cats to always land on their feet. Simple stuff, you say? You should see it in slow motion. No serious designer can afford to take these things for granted.

“How long did all this thinking and planning go on before the first piece of work was done? It may seem like a meaningless question, because the one about whom we ask it is not limited by time. But the question is not meaningless at all. The work may have been done ‘fast’ by our reckoning, but the work still had to be done. Every alternative had to be explored. Every potential problem had to be eliminated. Every detail had to be addressed. Nothing could be left to chance, for chance cannot be depended upon to create the best of all possible worlds.

“At every turn, a decision was required. Every decision had to be made and made in sequence, because some decisions depended on other decisions. How fast God went from one decision to another makes little difference. But if one decision had to follow another there was sequence. And if there was sequence, there was time—by any human reference, a lot of time.

“But time did not matter. God was in no hurry. He worked against no deadline. And He thoroughly enjoyed what He was doing. God the Creator was doing what He did best. He was creating one engineering marvel after another, one work of art after another, and myriads of creatures of staggering beauty and complexity.

“It was a joy. It was satisfying beyond belief. And unless you can understand this, you may never fully appreciate God. The words of Genesis seem to say that God took pride in His work, His planning, His craft...

“When God had finished all of His work, He looked around with great satisfaction and pronounced it ‘very good.’ He then crowned the creation with an act of great symbolism. When He was all finished, when He had pronounced it ‘very good,’ He stopped work and rested.

“Was He tired? Not in the traditional sense. But He had worked, not just for six days, but for all the time it took to plan it all before He ever started. He was not tired. He was not exhausted. He was not weary. He was not even finished.

“But for God, as for man, there is a time to cease from labor and to save what has been done. The ‘rest’ of God was a statement of how He felt about the incredible effort He had put into the creation of His world.”

Yes, God took great pleasure at all that He created. He said that it was very good, not just good. There was great feeling in that as if to say, "Wow, look at that!"
God’s Infinite Creativity

Not only is God’s power and His love truly awesome, so too is His creativity (Romans. 1:20). Most people focus on God’s all-powerful and all-loving nature but His infinite creativity is often overlooked. One of God’s remarkable personality traits is that He really goes out of His way to express His infinite creativity. We see it in how He continues to shower snowflakes all around the world, of which no two have ever been found to be alike. Look at all the incredible variety in the plant and animal kingdoms. There are thousands of species of animals and within each of those species there are a whole range of different varieties. God certainly must delight in watching animals at play from baby kittens and puppies to dolphins and whales. With many of the animals that He created He mimicked certain traits of man to help teach us lessons and to amuse us – traits such as the “speaking” ability of parrots, the “mourning of the dead” by elephants and the playful antics and basic skills of chimpanzees.

We also see God’s infinite creativity in the family of man with all the different races and sub-races that He has created for greater variety and beauty. Europe is a great place to see the variety God has created in our people and landscapes. There certainly is a wonderful variety of cultures, people, landscapes, architecture, languages, accents, food and so much more throughout Europe. God must take great pleasure in seeing all this variety of culture expressed in the family of man through its art, music, architecture and culture. As the French say, “Viva la difference”.

God Begins His Family with Adam and Eve

Let’s now look at that momentous moment that surely God had eagerly been looking forward to for a very long time like a parent awaiting the birth of its first child. Let’s now go to Genesis 1:26-28 where we read:

“Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

Adam was fashioned in a way that he looked very much like God. It was as if God were a sculptor, making a statue of Himself in flesh and blood and bone. God said “Let us make in our image, according to our likeness.” All the other animals were made after their own kind but man was made after the GOD kind! God wanted to create His own family. He wasn’t just content with the angels whom He individually created at a lower level from His own God level of existence. He wanted His own family of beings that looked liked Him and who were on the same God level of existence.

A newly married couple at some stage usually find that they want to share the wonderful life that they have together with children of their own and so begin to have children. Likewise God wanted to share the wonderful life that He has and can offer to others with children of His own. God wanted to have beings with different viewpoints and experiences to share their company with. God the Father and Jesus Christ wanted to fellowship and work together with a diversity of beings at their own level of God existence and so began the great plan of God TO REPRODUCE HIMSELF!

He started by creating Adam out of the dust of the ground. In Genesis 2:7 we read: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” He was called Adam which means red earth or dust of the ground. Before God created Eve He made Adam aware of the need he had for a companion by bringing all the animals before him and asking him to name them. Once he made Adam aware of his need God began to create his perfect match.
We read of it in Genesis 2:18-23: “And the Lord God said, ’It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’...And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man.'"

The Hebrew word for “now” in Genesis 2:23 is pa’am. It is derived from a root word which means to move or impel, conveying excitement. It is probably better translated “Wow! This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Adam saw Eve for the first time and said “Wo! Man” and from then on she became known as woman. Many a bachelor has probably wondered what Eve must have looked like. It must have been exciting and thrilling when God created Adam and Eve and watched them come together. When God blessed them and said “Be fruitful and multiply” He was effectively marrying them. Imagine the delight of God giving away Eve to Adam like a father giving away his daughter at a wedding.

God had created a beautiful garden for them to live in – the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8). Adam and Eve and their family were to add their own workmanship to the earth’s surface. He intended for them to work with it and to improve and beautify it. They would learn a little of the family business of creating like their Heavenly Father. They were told to dress and keep the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15).

Adam and Eve Disobey God and Eat the Forbidden Fruit

Tragedy would strike soon thereafter when they would eat of the forbidden tree. We don’t know how long after it was that they took the forbidden fruit. Some have suggested it may have been years after God had created them. We have no way of knowing for sure.

We have seen that righteous character can't be developed instantly. It takes time and it requires free moral agency. This kind of character must be DEVELOPED by the CHOICE of the one in whom it comes to exist. In order to test and develop their character God presented them with an important choice. This choice was necessary to determine if they would follow God and His way or reject God’s way and decide for themselves what was right and wrong. This test involved two symbolic trees.

"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate..." (Genesis 3:1-6)

Satan manifested himself as a serpent (Revelation 12:9) and like an underhand used car salesman tried to sell Eve on going the wrong way of life. He appealed to her vanity and deceived her into thinking she would be full of wisdom like God if she took of the fruit of the forbidden tree. She gave in to the temptation to eat the fruit even though she knew God had plainly told them not to eat it. She then offered it to Adam. Eve was tricked into it by Satan but Adam was not deceived by Satan when he ate the forbidden fruit in order to please his wife.

"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord
God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?' So he said, 'I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.' And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?' Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.' And the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate' (Genesis 3:7-13).

Eve blamed Satan and Adam blamed Eve rather than accepting responsibility for their own actions. God then cast them out of the Garden of Eden and barred their access to the tree of life. This cutting off of their access to the tree of life symbolized that God was cutting off access to the Holy Spirit. For a specific period of time, humanity would be on its own to live as best as it could making its own choices and deciding what is right and what is wrong. Mankind was allowed to live as it pleased – both good and evil. Without the help of God's spirit mankind could develop all kinds of wonderful technology and be capable of such awesome progress, yet would be plagued with appalling evils since humanity would be under the constant influence of Satan's broadcasts and be without the power of God's spirit to live the right way of life.

God's Contingency Plan to Pay for Man's Sins

As sad as it was to see them disobey, it certainly wasn't unexpected. God had developed a contingency plan in advance of this tragic mistake – the death of one of the members of the God family to pay for the sins of mankind. The apostle Peter wrote: "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish...foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Imagine how heavy this conversation must have been between the Father and Jesus Christ. "The only way we can pay for all their sins is with the death of one of us who have created them. The penalty for sin is not just cessation of life but the suffering that leads up to it as well. It will require a very painful death of one of us to do it." There was a great risk as the vulnerability to sin would greatly increase when Christ would become flesh and be subject to the flesh's natural desires. If He did sin that would leave only the Father left to make this sacrifice but no-one left to resurrect Him.

God’s Master Plan of 7000 years

Now we come to another choice that God had to make before He created Adam and Eve. Why was Satan allowed to remain on earth and sway mankind? God could have judged Satan and removed him before He created Adam. Why didn't God remove him before he created Adam? In his book “The Incredible Human Potential” Herbert W. Armstrong writes the following:

"God ordained that 6 000 years of sinning human existence PROVE FOR ALL TIME that Satan's way can result only in evils, suffering, frustration, hopelessness, and death. God is allowing Satan to deceive and sway mankind for 6 000 years to PROVE this truth, not only to the human race, but [also] to...the angels” (p.93).

God knew the kind of unbelievable sins and pain that would be afflicted on mankind by his fellow man. This was a tough call to make to not remove Satan, to create man physical and subject to physical pain and to ordain a period of 6 000 (instead of say 600 years) for man to suffer from every imaginable sin and every imaginable kind of suffering there is before Christ would rule for a thousand years.

As painful as it would be for mankind, God's decision to allow Satan to stay and tempt mankind for 6 000 years would deepen the contrast between God's way of life and the way of sin. It would allow the worst of humanity to display itself and build up the FULL range of sin and wrong experience to prove for the rest of eternity that sin hurts. A period of 6 000 years is nothing compared to the rest of eternity.
Now the Bible is silent on this point, but let’s hypothetically look at the possibility of God’s family continuing to expand after the New Jerusalem comes to earth with new people being born on other planets throughout the universe. Because of the 6,000 years of suffering that has occurred on earth there will be people in God’s family who have repented from every imaginable sin and suffered every imaginable kind of suffering there is. They will be able to play back and convey to anyone who has their doubts just how awful those sins are and convince them using their own experience as a reference that **SIN HURTS** and is just not worth it!

Even though God knew ahead of time that Adam and Eve were more likely to disobey than obey Him it still must have been terribly disappointing seeing them sin against Him and watching them shift the blame and not take responsibility for their own actions. Bill Cosby in his book “Fatherhood” offers this humorous look at events in the Garden of Eden:

"Whenever your kids are out of control, you can take comfort from the thought that even God’s omnipotence did not extend to His kids. After creating the heaven, the earth, the oceans, and the entire animal kingdom, God created Adam and Eve. And the first thing He said to them was ‘Don’t.’ To the animals, He never said, ‘Don’t’ - he hurled no negatives at the elephant - but to the brightest of His creatures, the ones who get into Yale, He said, ‘Don’t.’

"Don’t what?" Adam replied.  
"Don’t eat the forbidden fruit."  
"Forbidden fruit? Really? Where is it?"

"Is this beginning to sound familiar? You never realized that the pattern of your life had been laid down in the Garden of Eden" (p.64).

**The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden**

It must have been painful having to send his “kids” out of the Garden of Eden but there was a very long-sighted wisdom in God taking such a drastic course of action which would write a lesson in pain for ALL eternity that sin hurts. Sometimes I wonder how God can stand seeing so much pain on this planet and resist the urge to charge in straightaway and punish those who inflict such cruel torture and suffering on people and God sees FAR MORE of it than we do. Mr Armstrong in “Mystery of the Ages” describes the expulsion from the Garden of Eden this way:

"God said, in effect: ‘You have made the decision for yourself and the world that shall spring from you. You have rejected me as the basic source of knowledge -- you have rejected power from me through my Spirit to live the righteous way -- you have rebelled against my command and my government -- you have chosen the ‘GETTING,’ ‘TAking’ way of Satan. Therefore I sentence you and the world you shall beget to 6,000 years of being cut off from access to me and my Spirit -- except for the exceedingly FEW I shall specially call. And that FEW shall be called for special service preparatory for the kingdom of God. They shall be required to do what you have failed to do -- reject, resist and overcome Satan and his WAYS, and follow the ways of my spiritual LAW.

"Go, therefore, Adam, and all your progeny that shall form the world, produce your own fund of knowledge. Decide for yourself what is good and what is evil. Produce your own educational systems and means of disseminating knowledge, as your god Satan shall mislead you. Form your own concepts of what is god, your own religions, your own governments, your own life-styles and forms of society and civilization. In all this Satan will deceive your world with his attitude of SELF-centeredness -- with vanity, lust and
greed, jealousy and envy, competition and strife and violence and wars, rebellion against me and my law of LOVE.

"After the world of your descendants has written the lesson in 6,000 years of human suffering, anguish, frustration, defeat and death -- after the world that shall spring from you shall have been brought to confess the utter hopelessness of the way of life you have chosen -- I will supernaturally intervene. By supernatural divine power I shall then take over the government of the whole world. With re-education, I will produce a happy world of PEACE. And on repentance, I shall then offer eternal salvation to all. After a thousand years of that happy world to come, I will resurrect from death to mortal life all who have died uncalled during this present 6,000 years. Their judgment shall then come. And on repentance and faith, eternal life shall be offered them.

"During this 6,000 years, when I myself shall cut them off from me, they shall not be eternally judged. Only, as they sow during their lifetimes, they shall reap. But when I open eternal salvation to them, there shall be no Satan to hinder or deceive them -- no Satan for them to overcome. Those few called during this first 6,000 years shall have to reject and resist Satan's pulls and overcome. But those who overcome shall sit with me in my throne, and have power under me to rule all nations under my Supreme Rule” (p.99-100).

God is a Family

The Old Testament was originally written in a language called Hebrew. The Hebrew word which Moses used that is translated into God in Genesis 1 is the word “Elohim”. The 'im' at the end of any word in Hebrew has the same effect as putting an 's' at the end of a word in English like in cats or dogs. It means more than one but whenever it is used for God it is translated as a singular word (God), not as a plural word (Gods).

Now though there are some technical differences, it is similar to a uniplural word in English such as a team, church or family. There is one team or one church or one family but at the same time there are many members that are a part of that one team or one church or one family. God is one family made up of many members.

In Genesis 1:26 we read: “God said, Let US make man in OUR image, after OUR likeness.” We see here that God is a KIND of being by the way that at least two beings here are creating and saying, “Let US make man in OUR image”.

With this background we can explain John 1:1 this way. God is the family name like a surname. A man named Tom might be with his father Smith and Tom is also Smith. They are both called Smith because that is their surname or family name. God is a family of beings composed at the moment of two beings - God the Father and Jesus Christ. They are both God because God is their family name and because God is kind of being higher than that of the angels who are a lower kind of being.

The Greek word that is translated "Word" in John 1:1 is "Logos". This word in the context of John 1:1 means "Spokesman". Jesus Christ is God the Father’s spokesman. God the Father is Creator. But he "created all things by Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:9). Jesus is the Word. It is written, "He spake, and it was done" (Psalm 33:9). God tells Christ what to do (John 8:28-29). Jesus then speaks, as the workman, and the Holy Spirit is the POWER that responds and does what Jesus commands.

Christ is the God of the Old Testament

When Paul talked about Israel when they came out Egypt under Moses he said: "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus Christ was
the member of the God family who dealt personally with Israel in the Old Testament and was the one who appeared to Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments.

As we learn more about the emotions and personality of God we have to keep in mind that most references to God in the Old Testament that describe His emotions, His reactions and personality are referring to the God being who became Jesus Christ. There were quite a number of appearances of the “God of the Old Testament” – Jesus Christ prior to his incarnation when He lived and died for our sins. A common phrase seen in the prophetic books is “the word of the LORD came to me”. It is possible that this phrase means more than just a message coming to him from the Lord. It could be a reference to an appearance by the Word – Jesus Christ.

In John 14:7-9 we read: “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him. Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?”

In Hebrews 1:1-3 we read: “God...has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.” The word here for “express image” is the Greek word “charakter” which means a stamped impression – an exact copy. They think and act with complete unity of direction and purpose even though they are different individual beings.

We see from these two verses that the Father and the Son are very similar in most respects – they certainly have the same perfect loving character. They would react very similar to each other and no doubt their emotions and personality traits would be very similar.

God is the original Renaissance man – the creator and originator of all the different talents and abilities, both impressive and unusual we see exhibited throughout the whole human race. Our personalities are usually an expression of the few talents and abilities that we have. God has all those talents and abilities and is able to be “all things to all men” (1 Corinthians 9:22) and easily relate to everybody, a gift that eludes many of us because of our limited talents and personalities. One can’t help but wonder how much of a transformation of our basic personalities we will have when we are born into God’s family and be endowed with so many more different talents and abilities.

The Pre-Flood World

The next event recorded for us after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden is the birth of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-2). We talk about the miracle of childbirth. Here was the first time that it happened with human beings when they got to share in the creating of a new life. God would have enjoyed the delight that they experienced in this special moment.

Many more children would be born to Adam and Eve. According to Jewish tradition they had 63 children. If this is correct they obeyed well the command to be fruitful and multiply. When Cain and Abel had grown up Cain became jealous of Abel because God accepted the offering of Abel and not his because his attitude was not right. God tried to head off the tragedy reminding Cain that if he does well he would also be accepted. Cain however continued to brood and then killed Abel. The death of “righteous Abel” (Matthew 23:35) saw the death of the first christian martyr. Jude 11 speaks of the “way of Cain”. Sadly this violent proclivity of his was a habitual pattern in his life.

There must have been great pain in seeing the first murder. This pain can be felt in God’s words when he confronts Cain with his crime: “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand” (Genesis 4:10-11). For the first time a sentient being had been erased from existence, albeit temporarily until the resurrection.
It would not be the first murder. The Bible records another murder prior to the Flood, that of Cain’s descendant Lamech of a “young” man (Genesis 4:23-24) who was possibly another righteous man – Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24), who seemed to die prematurely compared to the long life spans of the other pre-Flood patriarchs. Violence and murder would increase over time and rise to epidemic proportions at the time of the Flood when it would be said that, “the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11).

It must have hurt God quite a lot seeing this degeneration in the state of mankind over the centuries between Adam and Noah. Despite all this sadness there were a few bright moments. In Genesis 4:26 we read: "And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD." The record doesn't clearly say who lead it, whether it was Seth or Enosh or someone else, but at this time there was a religious revival and men sought God in their life. This would have given God some joy.

**Noah’s Flood**

Immorality and violence had reached epidemic proportions by the time of Noah. God describes it this way: "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them" (Genesis 6:5-7).

How incredibly sad God must have been to say these things and what great pain He must have felt to come to the decision to bring about the Flood and destroy all mankind except for Noah and his family. Given the millions that were on earth and the fact there had been a religious revival previously, it’s truly hard to imagine that Noah was the only one in the world who truly stayed faithful to God. One would think there would have been more of a remnant that stayed faithful but sadly there wasn’t.

How would God have felt hearing the screams of utter terror and panic as the floodwaters violently rose? It was an incredibly dramatic step for God to take to wipe out all of humanity with the exception of Noah’s family. In one sense it was a merciful thing to do. Rather than continue their violent and immoral path they will, in the next second of their consciousness, come up in the second resurrection (Ezekiel 37:1-14, Revelation 20:5). At that time God the earth will be a glorious place and Satan will finally have been cast into the lake of fire never to influence mankind again. Rather than maintaining a hands-off policy with them as He does in this age before Christ’s return, He will be able to go straight to work converting their minds as He does now with those in the church.

There would have been great relief when it was over and there was a bright new fresh start with Noah and his family. You can feel the sobriety in God’s words when He promises not to bring another Flood on the world and sets the rainbow in the sky as the seal of that covenant (Genesis 9:13-17).

That positive fresh new start was not to last long. Noah’s son, Ham, when Noah gets drunk and is unrobed, does some wrong act to his father when he is naked (Genesis 9:22-25). The act is not explicitly mentioned in Genesis. Some have suggested a homosexual act but, according to Darrel Condor in his book “Mystery, Babylon the Great” (p.9-11), evidence from legends of mythology and Jewish tradition lean more towards an act of castration. There are plenty of echoes of Noah in Flood legends around the world, however, there is little about Noah or his life after the Flood despite the fact that He lived 350 years after the Flood. The act of robbing him of his manliness may have been a grab for control of the post-Flood world by Ham and may help to explain why Noah has such a low profile after the Flood.
The Tower of Babel

Ham’s grandson, Nimrod, would become the world’s first post-Flood dictator. He would symbolize post-Flood defiance of God and with his wife, Semiramis and son, Tammuz, they would form the great trinity of the ancient pagan world.

"And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’ But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city” (Genesis 11:4-8).

This would become the first post-Flood attempt at centralized, authoritarian government by a dictator. God looked at this “tower” project, and was so impressed with their accomplishment that he said: “this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.”

Would the construction of a brick building like a ziggurat so impress God that He would essentially say: “If they can do this already, then they will be able to implement even their wildest imaginations?”

My personal feeling is that it was something much more impressive than the biggest ziggurats of Mesopotamia. God stopped the project because mankind’s technical skills were advancing far too fast for His allotted timetable for mankind! They were developing technologies which would enable them to implement whatever they imagined, and God intervened to stop it. If it was a large ziggurat then one might question God’s success in slowing mankind’s progress since such ziggurats re-appear in Mesopotamia very soon after the nations are scattered by God.

God has myriads of angels who keep him informed regarding events on the earth, and they can easily convey their reports to Him in His heavenly domain – “They are the eyes of the Lord, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:10). Yet Genesis 12:5 says that the Lord came down to see the tower, which the children of men built. One gets the feeling that the angels told God about what was occurring on earth, but God felt it was imperative for Him to personally to inspect this tower being built by mankind. This reminds me of the bumper sticker that says – “Don’t make me come down there! – God”.

Abraham, the Friend of God

A couple of hundred years after this scattering of the nations by God He then set in motion a major aspect of His plan salvation of mankind. A crucial step in God’s long-term plan to turn all nations back to Him was the selection of the patriarch Abraham. The rest of the Bible is woven around His plan to reconcile all humanity to Himself. God chose Abraham and promised to develop his descendants into a group of influential nations chosen for the purpose of teaching and illustrating His values and way of life to the rest of the world.

God saw something special in Abraham. God has this incredible ability to see our extraordinary potential. While he made his share of mistakes God must have been very pleased with Abraham’s faithfulness and obedience which was tested to the limit when God asked him to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. Abraham knew Isaac’s birth was an absolute miracle but he must have been terribly bewildered at first that God would ask him to kill Isaac as a sacrifice to Him.

“The other barbaric gods asked for the first-born son to be slain as a sacrifice. Surely God can’t be that barbaric?”

There may well have been some initial anger before the wheels started turning over in his mind.
“God said that it would be through Isaac that these future nations would come from and He has the power over life and death so He could resurrect Isaac. That must be it. He must plan to resurrect Isaac afterwards.”

God must have been impressed, not only by Abraham’s willingness to go ahead with this difficult and unusual request but also with Isaac’s submission to Abraham after he probably explained what he had thought through. Abraham’s actions would symbolize the willingness of God the Father to offer His son to die for the sins of mankind and Isaac’s submission would symbolize Jesus Christ’s willingness to lay down His life for all of mankind.

"But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ So he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me’” (Genesis 22:11-12).

The Apostle James wrote that “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield” (James 3:17). God is easily entreated and willing to yield to our requests and decide to do things differently when we put a good case to Him. A good example of this is when Abraham intercedes for those in Sodom who are righteous and might perish with the wicked if Sodom was destroyed.

Firstly, Abraham persuades God not to destroy it if there are 50 righteous in the city. He then bargains with God (probably worried for Lot and his family) and successively persuades God not to destroy the city if there are 45 righteous, then 40, then 30, then 20 and finally he bargains with God down to not destroying Sodom if there are only 10 righteous. As it turns out there weren’t even 10 righteous in the city but God is merciful for Abraham’s sake and even though he hasn’t specifically requested it He removes Lot and his family out of Sodom for their own protection.

Abraham is called the friend of God in James 2:23. While the encounters that he had with God were very few in his life he is one of the few people to have had the privilege of talking with God face to face like you would with any friend. Often we yearn to be able to have a real interactive conversation with God just like this. God probably yearns to talk to us as His begotten children in such a direct, interactive way every bit as much. He must have treasured those occasions when He felt it was proper to do so.

There is a very interesting passage in Genesis 18 where it says: “The LORD said, The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know” (Genesis 18:20-21, NIV).

Now sometimes we tend to think of God as sitting up in heaven in front of a bank of TV sets seeing and knowing everything that we do. This scripture tells us that God went down to see if Sodom and Gomorrah was as bad as He had heard, presumably from the angels who observe what’s going on around the world and report back to God (Zechariah 4:10). He didn't know automatically. Even though he could know automatically if He wanted to, He chose to have it reported to Him. Then, rather than viewing how bad the cities were on a screen in heaven He chose to make a personal visit and see what it was like for Himself.

He must have been appalled at their depravity to have to personally destroy the place as He did. He must have been frustrated as well by how much Lot’s character was compromised by its influence.

**I Rejoiced in Your Fathers**

In Deuteronomy 30:9-10 we read: "For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers if you obey the voice of the LORD your God.” God took great delight in the faithfulness
of the founding fathers of the nation of Israel. Along with the mistakes and problems they had at times there were great moments of joy such as the birth of Isaac after so many years of waiting and the romantic coming together of Isaac and Rebekah and the love Jacob had for Rachel, whose years of service to wed her seemed but only a few days because of that love he had for her (Genesis 29:30).

There were also two great reunions that God must have had great pleasure in watching – one between Jacob and Esau and the other between Joseph and Jacob. There can be great joy at finding that which is lost which Jesus spoke about in the parable of the lost sheep which shows the joy God and the angels feel when a sinner comes to repentance (Luke 15:4-7).

Through the story of the life of Jacob we learn something about God’s personality. We learn that He likes to wrestle. He wrestled with Jacob for a whole night testing Jacob’s tenacity. Along with wrestling (and we’re talking about the Olympic style wrestling NOT the wild, staged WWF style) I’m sure there are many other sports that God enjoys.

In the movie “Chariots of Fire” the story is told of two British sprinters who competed in the Olympics in the 1920’s. One of those runners was Eric Liddell, a Scottish man very devoted to God. Believing the christian Sabbath to be Sunday He refused to race in the semis after finding out they were to be held on a Sunday even though he was the favourite to win the gold medal. (This is where I first heard about the Sabbath, though later learning it was on Saturday). His Jewish teammate, Harold Abrahams, would take the gold and another teammate gave up his spot in the 400m for Eric Liddell who would also win gold.

When asked why feels he should run competitively, he answers by saying “I run for His pleasure”. We are fascinated and excited about watching a blue ribbon event like the 100m dash so why wouldn’t God be also? God delights in seeing us developing and using our talents and gifts that He has given us for the good of others. We should learn what our God-given talents and gifts are and learn how we can best use them to serve others. God has given many extraordinary talents in a very random way at times. Some of those are gifts of great intelligence and musical ability while others that God has given are quite unusual and bizarre, the type one would see on ”Ripley's Believe It or Not!”

In the movie “Amadeus” the character played by Murray Abraham is tortured by jealousy wondering why such a profane man, as Amadeus Mozart was in real life, should be given such an extraordinary musical talent as he was but such is the random nature of the way God has given many talents at times. On the other hand God specifically blesses races and families in a planned and deliberate way through common family genes with certain talents. Craig White makes the comment that:

“God has set up nations for certain responsibilities based on natural gifts He has bestowed. He gives gifts to individuals, families, nations and races and it is therefore He who decides on their roles” (What Will Israel Be Doing in the World Tomorrow?, p.31).

The Exodus

In Genesis 15:12-16 we read: “Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

God knew in advance about the horrible slavery to come on Israel in Egypt. Abraham's reaction was one of horror and a feeling of great darkness when God told him about it. The four hundred years
included the sojourning of Israel in both Canaan AND Egypt from Abraham to Moses. The captivity itself, after the death of Joseph around 1590 BC, would last around 100 years. Still, it would hurt God knowing that they would go into captivity. From great pain would be born great lessons of faith and why God would restrain Himself from rescuing them before the right time. Having to exercise that kind of restraint when His people go through so much pain must really hurt God at times.

We see another interesting point in this passage. We see God’s mercy in giving the Amorites more time to repent. Sodom and Gomorrah reached that particular point of depravity early and paid the price. For the Amorites (a term meaning “from the west” – Canaan was west of Mesopotamia) there would be due process. Their time for judgment would come later only when their iniquity was complete or full.

"Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them…And the LORD said: ‘I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows’” (Exodus 2:23-25, 3:7).

God surely knew of their sorrows and it must have hurt Him to know He could step in and stop it at any time. He restrained Himself from doing so for a much greater purpose to teach incredible lessons for the benefit of all mankind. He would call out Moses to be His man to help lead the people out of slavery.

"Moses said to the LORD, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” So the LORD said to him, "Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD? “Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.” But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send." So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. "Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do” (Exodus 4:10-15).

God’s anger was kindled (or started up) by Moses’ excuses. He got a bit frustrated that Moses still wouldn’t trust Him after explaining to him that He made the human mouth and could give him that speaking ability with ease. Moses would eventually come around and take over the speaking for God instead of Aaron.

"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: “Israel is My son, My firstborn. "So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn” (Exodus 4:22-23).

You can sense the feeling in God’s words here. Israel is precious to God – His son and His firstborn. God would use Israel in time to be His model nation to encourage other nations to come under His rule. God’s justice would be executed on Egypt after the people had participated in partial genocide around the time of Moses’ birth 80 years earlier.

"And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him [Moses] and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses’ feet, and said, "Surely you are a husband of blood to me!” So He let him go. Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!”—because of the circumcision” (Exodus 4:24-26).
To many this incident would seem a little bizarre at first glance that just after God told Moses to go to Egypt and to the Pharaoh that He would seek to kill Moses. From the account we read that the offence was for Moses not circumcising his son. Why would God seek to do such a drastic thing for a seemingly small offence? God wasn’t going to do it because He is cruel. There are times when He feels the need to highlight the great gulf between God and man and how deep our respect for Him should be. We should not come before His presence lightly.

There are quite a number of incidents like this that highlight God’s very strong stance against sacrilege seen in the death penalty for breaking the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36), eating leaven during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:19) and eating on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:29).

"Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness'" (Exodus 5:1). The first thing that God tells them to say was that He wanted Israel to be free to come and have a feast and celebrate with Him. God is a God of joy and celebration and He wants us to enjoy life.

God would then send plagues on Egypt to break the Pharaoh and the people into letting the Israelites go. In the midst of this dramatic story is a mind game that God played with the Pharaoh in order to show His glory that reminds one of Proverbs 21:1 which reads: "The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord. Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." Let’s now read how God "messed with Pharaoh’s mind" in the Book of Exodus:

"So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation...And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time. The Lord is righteous, and my people and I are wicked. Entreat the Lord, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail, for it is enough. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer... And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the Lord had spoken by Moses. Now the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him..."

"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land—all that the hail has left...Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, "I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. "Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the Lord your God, that He may take away from me this death only.” So he went out from Pharaoh and entreated the Lord. And the Lord turned a very strong west wind, which took the locusts away and blew them into the Red Sea. There remained not one locust in all the territory of Egypt. But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go" (Exodus 9:24-10:20).

The account is written as if God deliberately moved the Pharaoh to be stubborn and not let the people go after the Pharaoh softened, not just once but at least twice, as even a pagan king would do after such devastation.

How do we reconcile this with James 1:13 which says: “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone”? Did God cause the Pharaoh to sin by moving him, through impulses broadcast to his human spirit (Ezra 1:1), to not let the Israelites go? Well, the Israelites were not without sin themselves. Their rotten attitudes and faithlessness in the wilderness showed that they had greatly absorbed a lot of Egypt’s sinful culture. It is sometimes God’s just punishment for their sins for a people to go into slavery which would help move them to repentance, so for Him to move the Pharaoh to hold them just a little longer in captivity does not conflict with God’s justice.
Finally would come the last plague which would completely break the spirit of the Egyptians – the killing of the firstborn. For the Israelites to be protected they were commanded to slay a lamb and sprinkle its blood on their lintel and doorposts so God would pass over their house. The killing of the lambs symbolized the high price God would have to pay later on to make our freedom from sin possible.

The Israelites were told to pick out a lamb on the tenth day and hold it for four days (Exodus 12:3). During those four days it was very easy to become attached to it with it wandering around in their household. To have to kill it after those four days was to be a deeply emotional experience to help them to feel what it was like for God to give up His only Son (John 3:16) in order to pass over our sins.

After such a long time of slavery God must have greatly rejoiced when Israel were finally freed from slavery, just as the Israelites celebrated that night that they left. Today we celebrate that night in a different spirit as those events symbolize our release from the slavery of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ and the waters of baptism.

**God Parts the Red Sea**

God would perform one more great miracle to guarantee their freedom, which was also a type of baptism. He would part the waters of the Red Sea so they could flee from the chariots of Pharaoh who would be killed by the waters as they crashed back on them. This would symbolize our deliverance from Satan and his minions.

"Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, ‘They are bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.’ Then I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD.’ And they did so” (Exodus 14:1-4).

Here we see God sets the Israelites up so they will be trapped between Pharaoh’s army and the Red Sea. They would then only have one hope of deliverance – the hand of God. This would test their faith and provide an opportunity to teach them the lesson of relying on Him.

"And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD. Then they said to Moses, ‘Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness” (Exodus 14:10-12).

Here we see a sad lack of faith on the part of the Israelites who had already witnessed the hand of God deliver them from Egypt with ten mighty plagues only days earlier.

"And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace’...Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. And He..."
took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, 'Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians.'

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen.' And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses" (Exodus 14:13-14, 21-31).

One can't help but get a sense of awe and wonder at God's saving hand and power here when one watches this scene of God parting the Red Sea in the Cecil B. De Mille classic "The Ten Commandments", even though the reality of this event is that the opening across the sea was more likely at least a mile wide rather than the narrow passage seen in the movie.

Israel in the Wilderness of Shur

"So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. There He made a statute and an ordinance for them. And there He tested them, and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you" (Exodus 15:22-26).

This would be one of many times the Israelites would test God's patience. It would get to the point where He would have killed them all had it not been for Moses' intervention and pleading his case to God. It was phenomenal how quickly and how often they would complain to God after having witnessed far greater miracles by God. Firstly, they complained about the bitter waters at Marah, then not having enough food, then no meat, then not having enough water and on and on it went. It greatly frustrated and tried God's patience.

Another point that comes through in the above passage is that God cares for our health. He doesn't want us to get sick and through the penalty paid by Christ on the cross He has made provision for us to be healed of those sickness. Here He calls Himself "the Lord who heals you."

The Rebellions of Israel

In their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land the Israelites greatly tested God's patience and aroused His anger many times. In order those rebellions were as follows –

1] When they were trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea and complained that it would have been better to serve the Egyptians than that they should die in the wilderness (Exodus 14:11-12). It showed a lack of faith after God freed them from Egypt with the ten plagues.

2] At Marah where they complained about the bitter water there and not having good water to drink (Exodus 15:23-25).
3] In the Wilderness of Sin when they complained and said it would have been better to die in Egypt than die with hunger in the wilderness (Exodus 16:1-3). They should have shown much more faith considering they had just witnessed the dramatic miracles of the plagues of Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. God then sent them manna.

4] After the manna came many kept some till the next day when it stank as God had said through Moses (Exodus 16:20). Also many broke the Sabbath by going out and searching for manna on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:27).

5] When they complained again about not having any water at Rephidim and God made water came out of the rock in Horeb after Moses struck it (Exodus 17:1-7).


7] When a fire from the Lord burned among them after they aroused God to anger for complaining over something that is not specified at Taberah (Numbers 11:1-3).

8] When the mixed multitude complained about the manna and lusted for the meat God provided when he sent them quails (Numbers 11:4-35).


10] The murmuring of the people against the spies report which God noted as the tenth time that they had provoked Him. (Numbers 14)


12] At Meribah when they yet again complained about not having any water (Numbers 20). God provided water but rebuked Moses for not crediting God for providing water when he said, "Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" (Numbers 20:10).

13] As they went around the land of Edom they again complained about not having any water or food and they weren't grateful for the provision of manna which they called "worthless bread" (Numbers 21:5). God sent serpents among them and many died. God provided a way they could be healed by looking up towards a bronze serpent.

14] When many of the men of Israel committed fornication with the women of Moab who persuaded them to worship their pagan gods (Numbers 25). A plague went through the camp and Phineas in his zeal for God killed two of the fornicators.

In amongst those rebellions there were five separate occasions when God set Himself to kill all the Israelites because of their great sin and lack of faith but was persuaded to relent because of the intervention of Moses, Aaron and Phinehas.

1] When Israel rebelled at Mt Sinai by making and worshiping a golden calf. Moses then persuaded God not to kill them so the other nations wouldn't be able to say that He couldn't bring them into the land He had promised them.

2] When Israel murmured after the spies report and complained that they could not take the land even though God was on their side. Again Moses was able to persuade God not to kill them so the other nations wouldn't be able to say that He couldn't bring them into the land He had promised them.
3] During the rebellion of Korah when a great many of the people sided with Korah. Moses was able to persuase God to only kill the main instigators of the rebellion and gave the people a chance to get away from them or be destroyed with them.

4] After Korah and his fellow rebels were killed the people murmured against the punishment. God this time began the process of killing them all, bar Moses and the few faithful like Joshua and Caleb. Moses tells Aaron to urgently take a censer, make atonement and stand between the living and the dead. God then relented after 14 700 were killed with a plague.

5] During the rebellion when many Israelite men fornicated with Moabite women and bowed to their gods. God again started a plague meant to kill all of Israel bar the faithful few. He stopped the plague after being moved by Phinehas' zeal in urgently killing an Israelite and his Moabite woman who had brazenly paraded themselves before the people. Some 24 000 died in that plague.

**God Reveals to Israel His Sabbath**

"The Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not” (Exodus 16:4).

God weighs our hearts and provides tests from time to time to test how much we want to keep His laws such as the Sabbath that was tested here.

After the manna came many kept some till the next day when it stank as God had said through Moses (Exodus 16:20). Also many broke the Sabbath by going out and searching for manna on the Sabbath.

"Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the Lord said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day. And the house of Israel called its name Manna. And it was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey" (Exodus 16:27-31).

In the UCG booklet "The Ten Commandments the following comments are made about the Sabbath:

The Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, was set apart by God as a time of rest and spiritual rejuvenation...Relationships take time. Every successful association demands time. No close relationship can succeed without it—no courtship, no marriage, no friendship. Our relationship with God is no exception (p.31).

God gave the Sabbath to Israel as a delight or a luxury (Isaiah 58:13-14). It’s a day to be refreshed and be renewed. He gave it to us because He cares for us and wants us to have the right balance between work and rest so we don’t burn ourselves out. In our greed and our selfishness we can find ourselves ignoring God’s Sabbath command to our own hurt. God faithfully provided the Israelites with extra manna the day before so they could take full advantage of this precious gift that He had given them yet some in their greed for food broke God’s command.

The Sabbath is a day that are reminded of God’s purpose for our lives. It’s a day that God has given to us so we can withdraw from the treadmill and the distractions and the hassles and begin to realize there is much more meaning to life that just earning a living. It’s a wonderful day of rest and spiritual rejuvenation if we choose to obey it as God wants us to.

It’s a foundational commandment because only by investing solid time in our relationship with God, drinking in of His words and applying them can we expect to grow in God’s character and lead a moral
Abandoning it, as many Israelites would do in the time of the kings and prophets, would be the first pivotal step in moving away from God after which idolatry and immorality on a grand scale would later follow.

The manna is described as a pleasant tasting food and it would, for much of the time, be just about their only source of nourishment. They couldn’t store it up like grain so they would truly learn the lesson of relying on God for their daily bread. In Greek legend the heavenly bread would be remembered as ambrosia or the heavenly bread. There was no doubt that it was pleasant to the taste but in time they would be sick of the lack of variety in their diet and call it “worthless bread”. While God would have been willing to add variety in their diet later if they asked Him in a humble manner, their approach was constantly one of whining, not of humility when things weren’t to their liking.

**Israel is Attacked at Rephidim by the Amalekites**

"Then the Lord said to Moses, Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven...Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God" (Exodus 17:12, Deuteronomy 25:17).

God was VERY angry at Amalek for their ambush on Israel killing the stragglers who would have mostly been defenceless women and children. God is especially horrified at acts of brutality against children and those who can't defend themselves. God made sure the Amalekites were punished which occurred in the time of Saul.

The Amalekites were the forefathers of some of the Arab peoples. Some of their descendants have also committed great atrocities against innocent people such as the World Trade Center disaster. God would have been just as angry and horrified by such inhuman acts against innocent people. Yet what happened on September 11, 2001 is only the tip of the iceberg of the brutal acts committed against innocent people over the centuries. Hitler, himself ordered the execution of 6 million Jews in the holocaust which was a far greater disaster.

In Exodus 18 we see that God was open to Jethro’s suggestions to Moses on how the people should be judged and governed in order to help Moses bear the load of judging the people's disputes. Later He would give Moses more help by giving His spirit to the seventy elders (Numbers 11:16-25).

**God Marries Israel**

The Israelites finally arrived at God's mountain, Mt Sinai, where God would reveal His plan for them and propose to them the old covenant.

"And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'" (Exodus 19:3-6).

God tells them of the reason that He has chosen them as His people. It wasn't a matter of God playing favourites. He said that He didn't call them because they were more numerous or any greater in influence than other nations (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). He said that they were the least of nations when He called them out of Egypt and that He was going to remain faithful to His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to make of them a group of influential nations. God called them not because they deserved it but for a service which would ultimately benefit all mankind.
God wanted a free, obedient and happy people free of the many burdens governments put on people. Other peoples would look at them thinking, "How can we be free from the burdens our governments put on us" and from that could spread the idea, "Hey, let's worship Israel's God. Let Israel's God be our king." It was God's intent that the whole world be blessed through the descendants of Jacob.

God was using a nation which was small in number, yet with incredible qualities and abilities, to confound the other nations. There is nothing here to suggest that they were inferior which some speculate to be the case. Rather, they possessed attributes which gave them a capacity to rule, be inventive and be sober and law-abiding over and above others...For God to court and choose as wife one of the nations, tells us a little something about the people He chose (Israel – Descendants of Arphaxad, C.M.White, p. 3-4).

Yet God knew with their natural God-given talents as a people they would flounder and rebel against Him and His law without His Holy Spirit that was denied to them (with the exception of a few kings and prophets, etc.). Israel would be God's guinea pig to prove with every other physical advantage and even knowledge of His law man cannot live by God's way without His spirit.

God makes it plain in Deuteronomy 31:20-21 that He knew Israel would be unfaithful to Him. "When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant. Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them."

The physical people of Israel would fail to keep the old covenant and pay the price for their rebellion. However they will eventually live up to their destiny as a model nation God will use to bring all nations to Him. This won't happen until after the return of Jesus Christ under the terms of the new and better covenant which will include a promise not offered by the original covenant at Mt Sinai – God's Holy Spirit. They will become a part of spiritual Israel and fulfil their destiny.

In speaking of their eventual breaking of the covenant God knew ahead of time would happen God says in Deuteronomy 4:25-31:

"When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the LORD your God to provoke Him to anger...the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you...But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them”

God here emphasizes that He is a merciful God - He loves to show mercy. We might forsake Him but He will not forsake us or forget His promises. Coming back to the story in Exodus 19 we read:

"So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.” So Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to
the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. “And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.” (Exodus 19:7-11).

God chose them and offered to bless them physically if they would obey Him. The people said, “I do” to the terms God offered and so the old covenant was made between God and the people of Israel. Israel became God’s bride and wife and God the husband according to Jeremiah 31:32.

This was the wedding day of the old covenant. Like the bride they were, God told them to wash their clothes and look their best for their husband.

“Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Exodus 24:9-11).

What would it have been like to be at this great feast? How must have God, in the person of Jesus Christ, felt like to dine and talk face-to-face with Moses and these elders? In keeping with His plan God rarely has this kind of direct interaction with His people so He must treasure these times very much as they did. What must it have been like to see some of His glory with paved sapphire stones instead of the red carpet we use for dignitaries? This was the wedding reception for the old covenant marriage. This was a small foretaste of the much greater marriage supper of the lamb at Christ’s return (Revelation 19).

God Gives Israel His Great Law

After the third day God came down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people and thundered the Ten Commandments – His great law for all mankind (Exodus 20). The Ten Commandments and the statutes and judgments which would soon follow give us the principles of life that tell us what makes life work and what doesn’t. They are a great gift, giving us a deeper insight into the mind and wisdom of God and showing us the difference between the way of give versus the way of get.

Of the Ten Commandments, seven of them begin with “Thou shalt not” and this has led to the idea that the Ten Commandments are negative and restrictive. Why do seven of them start with “Thou shalt not”?

Well, you have to think about it in terms of how a parent gradually teaches a child how to behave and live a moral life. Because of the limited comprehension of an infant a parent has to be very specific and, more often than not, they have to tell them not to touch something or do something because infants do whatever they feel like or what comes naturally. As the child grows the instructions from the parent are still mostly specific actions but there is more of a balance between positive directions and negative ones.

As the child gets older still the parent explains more of why they are asked to do things or not do certain actions. The parent teaches the child more about the principles of why things are right and wrong. The more they grasp those principles of why things are right and wrong, the more the directions from the parents move from specific actions to principles and attitudes.

The way that God teaches us His way of life in the Bible is much the same way. We, like the Israelites when they came out of Egypt, are like spiritual infants when we first start to learn about God’s way of life. The Ten Commandments are mostly specific actions where God tells us not to do certain things. The statutes and the judgments again mostly deal with specific actions rather than principles and there is more of a balance between positive actions and negative ones.
As the people of Israel did not have God’s spirit and were spiritually immature God had to be very specific and tell them what they could and couldn’t do. When we get to the New Testament most of the new teaching introduced about God’s way of life focuses on attitudes like the fruits of God’s spirit and the principles behind the laws of God.

Individually we are at different stages. Psychologists tells us that our actions toward others take on different roles where we take the role of a parent at some times, the role of an adult at others and sometimes the role of a child. God is called the husband of Israel in places and a father in other places.

"Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.’ And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.’ So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was" (Exodus 20:18-21).

How did God feel when the people wanted Moses to speak to God and not let God directly speak to them? Moses had deep respect for God but was not afraid and drew near to God while the people lacked respect for God and were afraid of Him in the wrong kind of way.

**God is a Jealous God**

The Ten Commandments start with these words: "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:3-5).

God here describes Himself using a powerful emotion – He calls Himself a jealous God. What we would call godly jealousy could best be defined as an intolerance to unfaithfulness. Jealousy is not entirely synonymous with a similar emotion we call envy. Envy is always wrong but there is a right and wrong kind of jealousy. By understanding the right and wrong kind of jealousy we can understand the difference between envy and jealousy. In their book "Why Do I Do What I Don't Want To Do?" William Backus and Marie Chapian make the following comments:

"Certain jealousy may be sinful, and yet other times it may be the appropriate desire to keep what is yours to yourself. It may be appropriate for a person to be jealous for his spouse. Notice we don’t use the word ‘suspicious.’ ‘Jealous’ and ‘suspicious’ should not be used interchangeably. Godly jealousy in marriage refers to a desire to keep united that which God has sacredly united.

“There are times when jealousy is not appropriate—namely, when a thing is not rightfully ours. Jealousy, then, to be a godly emotion, must be motivated by the desire to guard what is rightfully ours. Envy is a different matter. Envy has nothing to do with what we already have. The envious person is worried about what somebody else has. The envious person cannot tolerate somebody’s having something he or she wants and cannot have” (p.64).

In the second commandment He says that He is "a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands." The consequences of our sins can carry on to the third and fourth generations after us. God can punish a nation as a whole to the third and fourth generation as well such as the captivity of
the people of Judah which lasted 70 years. Those of succeeding generations who were born in that captivity felt the consequences of God’s punishment He meted out on their parents and grandparents.

On the flip side when God is delighted with the obedience of someone His mercy and generosity upon that person can spill over and benefit many thousands of others who come into contact with that person. It can sometimes last hundreds of generations, like in the case of the birthright blessings enjoyed by nations such as America and Britain because of the obedience thousands of years ago of their patriarch Abraham.

In Exodus 34:11-16 we read more about God’s jealousy for His people that He had entered a covenant relationship with. He did not want them being unfaithful to Him playing the harlot with other gods.

"Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images '(for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods."

God's Statutes Show More of the Mind of God

Exodus 21 to 23 outline a lot of the statutes and judgments that give us more of an insight into the mind of God. One thing that can be seen in these chapters is the frequency of the word "if". A lot of these situations men would get into, such as slavery, were not the ideal – they weren’t the way God intended things to be. Wise solutions were given to deal with these less than best situations that men would get themselves into at times.

Let’s have a little bit of a look at God’s ingenuity and wisdom with the statutes by looking at some of the statutes and judgments.

"If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price (dowry) for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins (Exodus 22:16-17).

"Now look at the Eternal’s law from the perspective of a man thinking about enticing a woman. If he just wants a good time now, the woman could tell her father about him later and he could be stuck with her for the rest of his life—a fearful thought. On the other hand, if he thinks he does love her and wants to marry her, the woman's father could always say no. He would still have to pay the bride price, he would have a bad name, and he would not have a wife. If he does not have the bride-price, he could become a servant. It would seem much better to wait and to ask to marry the woman, rather than entice her.

"The situation is equally bad from the woman's perspective. If she just wants a fun time now, her father may demand that she settle down and marry the man. Yet if she is trying to 'catch' the husband of her dreams, he could be denied to her. In any case, if she loses her virginity, she has greatly decreased the chances of her marrying at all. The problem will stay with her whether anyone finds out about the affair or not. If the Eternal's law were practiced, sex outside of marriage would be understood to be the disastrous practice that it really is.
"If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep...If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double (Exodus 22:1, 4).

"Why the different amounts of restoration: 5, 4 or 2 times the value? There is a very good reason! If the thief is selling what he steals, he is making theft a business—he is getting rid of the evidence in order not to be caught. He did not take an ox or a plough or an axe because he needed one, he took it because he wanted to get money. There is a fivefold restoration for stealing the animals or tools that a person needs to do his regular work. An ox was a trained animal that was used for pulling wagons, ploughing, etc. A sheep did not do daily work, but was used for wool once a year, or eaten (once in its lifetime)” (O How Love I Thy Law, Servants News, 1996).

This principle of double or more restitution to the owner of property that has been stolen from him helps promote security in a society. If the law is being upheld by good law enforcement then people will feel more safe regarding their property knowing if it is stolen from them they will receive much more than what was stolen from them.

Statutes are secondary laws that made by lawmakers. Judgments are judicial decisions based upon the principles of already existing laws to come up with a decision as to how best to apply those principles where there is no specific law to cover what is being judged upon. To determine whether a law in the Old Testament is a statute or a judgment we need to understand why the particular law was made and then we need to ask whether that law can be applied for all cultures for all times. If it can be, it’s a statute (Leviticus 11, 23:31), otherwise it’s a judgment (Deuteronomy 22:8, Jeremiah 7:22).

God did not bother to tell the Israelites that eating fat would clog their arteries. They would have asked, 'Lord, what is an artery?' He simply told them not to eat it and warned of discipline if they did [Leviticus. 7:22-26]. It is not dissimilar to some parental warnings to children – 'Because I told you so,' comes to mind.

This law serves as a good illustration of the idea behind law in general. Many people tacitly accept an ‘arbitrary God’ theory - that is to say that God arbitrarily made this act wrong and that act right. They assume that an act is not intrinsically wrong, but is wrong merely because ‘God said so’. This theory allows that God could just as easily have said, 'Thou shalt commit adultery,' and we all could have had a lot more fun.

But what if it is the other way around? What if the reason God said an act is wrong is because it really is wrong? It is wrong because it hurts someone. It is wrong to eat fat, not because it shortens God's life, but because it shortens yours” (CEM BCC, Lesson 5, p.3).

The difference between right and wrong is not always so easy to see. Life is complex, and the variations in life situations are endless. A law that could tell us what to do at every turn in the road would fill all the libraries in the world. Instead, what we have are basic laws, necessary statutes, and a selection of explanatory judgments. These are given to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path [Psalm 119:105]” (CEM BCC, Lesson 6, p.8).

God’s laws on government are designed to protect the people from having unfit men gain positions of power and limit the burden put on the people by those in authority. They are also designed to help leaders best serve the people. Some government statutes and judgments include the qualities to look for in appointing leaders and judges (Exodus 18:21), kings having to write a copy of the Law
(Deuteronomy 17:18-19) and limits on the power of any future king that the people of Israel might ask for (Deuteronomy 17:14-17).

In Deuteronomy 18:1-2 we read: "The priests, the Levites—all the tribe of Levi—shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and His portion. Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; the LORD is their inheritance, as He said to them" (Deuteronomy 18:1-2).

God determined that the Levites would receive no land inheritance but only receive the tithes of the people. The Levites were like the civil servants of Israel. Of the Levites only those men descended from Aaron were a part of the priesthood. That the Levites had no land inheritance shows that God understands the need for checks and balances when you are dealing fallible humans who are given power and authority.

There are three tithes spoken of the Bible. The first tithe or tenth of our income is to go to God to support the work of the church (Leviticus 27:30, Malachi 3:8-10, Matthew 23:23, Hebrews 7). The second tithe or tenth of our income is for us to save and spend on ourselves and others during God's Holy Days such as the Feast of Tabernacles.

In Deuteronomy 14:24-27 we read: “But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe...then you shall exchange it for money...You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.” God wants us to be generous to others with our second tithe, not extravagant if it comes at the expense of others.

The third tithe was a part of ancient Israel's welfare system and was taken up in the third and sixth years of each seven year cycle to provide for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29) with preference given to those who could not glean the fields. The third tithe backed up the primary means of providing for the poor, which was gleaning what crops and fruit were left behind by those who harvested the land (Leviticus 19:9-10). With the primary emphasis on gleaning so that those who were out of work were gleaning for their sustenance rather than receiving a handout it would ensure the welfare burden on the state and people was light.

In Exodus 34:26 we read: “The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God.” We see here in the law of the firstfruits that God that wants our best. As the great King of the Universe we should respectfully give Him the very best of what we have and not give Him the leftovers of our time and resources. God knows we suffer when we let Him and His way of life slip down our list of priorities putting other things ahead of Him.

God's laws on justice are designed to serve the people by punishing and truly rehabilitating those who break the laws as well as protect the rights and property of those in the land who are law-abiding citizens. We spend enormous sums maintaining prisons, but under the Israel laws the following methods were used in punishment:

1) The death penalty for capital offences such as murder (Genesis 9:5-6, Exodus 21:12-14), kidnapping (Exodus 21:16), adultery (Leviticus 20:10-21), homosexuality and bestiality (Leviticus 20:13-16), blasphemying God (Leviticus 24:11-16, 23), desecration of the Sabbath (Exodus 35:2) and idolatry (Exodus 22:20). Remember that those who are condemned to the death penalty will be raised in the second resurrection so this is not a heartless act on God's part that some people would make out.

2) Whipping from one to forty stripes for minor offences (Deuteronomy 25:1-3).

3) In case of stealing and destruction of another man's property, restitution: to which must be added from one hundred to four hundred per cent as punishment (Exodus 22:1-4).

4) Those who were financially unable to make restitution or pay the fine, were compelled to contribute their work and labour until the debt had been fully paid (Exodus 22:1-3).
5) Confinement in a city of refuge for accidental killing (Numbers 35:22-28).

One of the laws which reflects God’s emotions is found in Exodus 23:24 where God says: “You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless”.

God shows great passion in His anger towards those who would take advantage of people that are less fortunate. He has great concern for the little people, unlike many who rule nations and even church organizations at times.

“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:17-19).

God is not partial or racist. He is completely fair in the way He administers justice balancing that justice with mercy. He loves the stranger. We should show love and concern for those amongst us who are strangers. God loves generosity of spirit and a willingness on our part to help the poor.

In Deuteronomy 15:11 God says: “For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.’”

The purpose of the religious laws God gave to Israel were to help them stay close to God and maintain a high standard of morality and love and concern for each other which would result in peace and cooperation in Israel as well as many other blessings.

The Sabbath and the Holy Days, were the fundamental religious laws God gave (Leviticus 23) along with rules of cleanness and uncleanness and other rules of purity (Numbers 19:11-22). The sacrifices were given (Leviticus 1-6) for the purpose of impressing on a carnal, physical people the need of a far greater sacrifice to come in the person of Jesus Christ, the son of God (Hebrews 10:1-10) and to impress on them the need to show thankfulness to God for all the wonderful things that God has done for His people.

In Exodus 23:14 God says: “Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year.” God wanted their worship of Him to be joyful and something that they really looked forward to.

In Leviticus 23:2 before He would explain what His Holy Days were God says: “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.’”

He says that these are MY feasts, not the feasts of the Jews or of Israel. God gave them to not only teach them of His great plan of salvation but also to celebrate, be thankful and to have fun with God.

They reveal the framework that organizes the major events of God’s plan in a logical order...When God freed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, He revealed to them, in addition to the weekly Sabbath, His seven annual festivals. The apostle Paul tells us these observances are ‘a shadow of things to come’ (Colossians 2:16-17) - that is, they foreshadow and reveal the basics of His plan of salvation.

God originally gave them as harvest festivals - and for an appropriate reason. The writers of the Bible often compare the spiritual harvest of human lives to the agricultural harvests that physically sustain life. Therefore we find harvest analogies...
and parables to represent aspects of God's plan to bring humanity to repentance. God's goal is to harvest human beings - you and me - into His Kingdom...

Seven annual festivals are listed in the Scriptures: (1) the Passover, (2) the Feast of Unleavened Bread, (3) the Feast of Firstfruits (Pentecost), (4) The Feast of Trumpets, (5) the Day of Atonement, (6) the Feast of Tabernacles and (7) the Last Great Day. Each focuses on a specific aspect of God's plan.

Occurring during the physical harvests of life-sustaining food products, God's festivals all point to aspects of His spiritual harvest of humanity to eternal life. As is so often the case in the Scriptures, God uses physical things to help us better understand spiritual truths. Jesus Himself frequently drew physical analogies to teach spiritual principles" (UCG Bible Study Course - Lesson 12 – 'God's Festivals: Keys to Humanity's Future, p.2-3).

In Deuteronomy 16:13-14 God says: "You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates."

God COMMANDS us to rejoice at the feast which means that joy is a willful choice. The Feast of Tabernacles is a seven day feast which is a type of the seven day wedding feasts of ancient Israel. There will be great joy after the marriage of Christ and the church when, together, we will help bring joy to the whole world and many more sons and daughters of God will be brought to glory (Hebrews 2:10). Regardless of how tough life is at times we have so much to be thankful for - we have this great calling to be among the firstfruits. We have the knowledge of God's wonderful way of life and God's great plan to save all mankind. We also know that there is a far better world coming when Christ returns. God wants us to put our worries aside during the Feast and be thankful and rejoice in these wonderful blessings and share that joy with as many people as we can.

Ever since Christ tabernacled with Israel (1 Corinthians 10:4) and tabernacled with mankind (John 1:14) when He became flesh He has always desired to return. The Father can hardly wait until He can tabernacle and live with man for all time (Revelation 21, 22) when the heavenly Jerusalem will come to earth. The Father has remained separate from mankind for all this time. We read in 2 Peter 3:10 that sometime in the future that the earth will be cleansed by fire. The great meaning behind this is to teach mankind that God cannot live with sin and that it is utterly repugnant to Him.

God's laws on family life are designed to keep families strong and safe from the threats of infidelity, fornication, immorality of other kinds and financial hardship. Some of those family laws included: honouring our parents (Exodus 20:12), honouring the elderly (Leviticus 19:32), diligently teaching children the truth and ways of God (Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Ephesians 6:4), commands against actions such as fornication (Exodus 22:16-17), marrying outside of Israel (Deuteronomy 7:3) (and today the church 1 Corinthians 7:39, 2 Corinthians 6:14), homosexuality (Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:26-27) and incest (Leviticus 18), exemption from military and other civil duties for newlyweds (Deuteronomy. 24:5).

"If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus 20:13).

The word abomination means much more than a simple dislike of something. It refers to a great and passionate hatred of something.

Some of the other things that he describes with passionate hatred using the word abomination include eating unclean meats (Leviticus 11), homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22), eating a peace offering older
than two days (Leviticus 19:7), idolatry (Deuteronomy 7:25), using pagan customs to worship Him (Deuteronomy 12:30-31) as mainstream Christianity does with Christmas and Easter, offering to God an animal which has a blemish (Deuteronomy 17:1), witchcraft and spiritism (Deuteronomy 18:10-12), transvestism (Deuteronomy 22:5), giving the profit of a harlot or criminal as an offering (Deuteronomy 23:18), taking back a wife after a husband has divorced her because of uncleanness (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) and being dishonest in business with dishonest scales (Deuteronomy 25:13-16). Most of those labelled in particular with the term abomination have to do with sacrilege.

In Deuteronomy 12:29-31 God says: “When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.”

God says don’t mix my stuff with theirs – I hate it! Using pagan customs to worship God is one of the first steps in the progression away from God’s way of life. Offering their firstborn to pagan gods by burning them in fire was ultimately where that progression lead to in time.

God’s laws on property and economics are designed to ensure the protection of the property and inheritance of men from theft, damage and devaluation. Those laws are designed to keep the economy strong ensuring full value for the effort produced in obtaining goods and protect it from the threats of excessive interest, taxation and debt.

Some of those property and economic laws include having just weights and scales and a just medium of exchange (Deuteronomy 25:15) forbidding of interest to fellow Israelites except for commercial loans (Exodus 22:25), the clearing of debts at the end of each seven year cycle (Deuteronomy 15:1-6), the Jubilee law (Leviticus 25:8-17), the land sabbath (Leviticus 25:1-7), and laws concerning the borrowing of items (Exodus 22:14-15).

God’s health laws include the forbidding of eating a range of animals that were designed for scavenging and other purposes than food such as seafood and pigs (Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14), banning of drinking of blood (Leviticus 17:10-14, 19:26) and eating animal fat (Leviticus 7:23-25). Animals that die naturally are not to be eaten (Deuteronomy 14:21) and the kidneys and the liver are also forbidden (Exodus 29:13, 22). God commanded the Israelites to physically circumcise their male babies on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3) and to bury their sewerage (Deuteronomy 23:13-14).

In Deuteronomy 23:13-14 God says: “You shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse. For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you” (Deuteronomy 23:13-14).

God wants us to have good physical cleanliness as well. Since He would walk among them He did not want to be dishonoured by the presence of filth in the camp of Israel. They were to be holy and separate from what is filthy and unclean just as God is holy.

With all our high technology in our society we still choose to ignore this simple, common sense law of God’s by dumping raw sewerage into our seas rather than returning it to the soil where soil organisms and bacteria can build up the quality of the soil as God designed it to happen.
God’s Involvement in the Affairs of His People

In Exodus 28:30 we read: “And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD’. The Life Application Bible makes the following comments about the Urim and Thummim:

The Urim and the Thummim were used by the priest to make decisions. These names mean "Curses" and "Perfections" and refer to the nature of God whose will they revealed. They were kept in a pouch and taken out or shaken out to get either a yes or no decision...

What were the Urim and Thummim? Little is known about them, but they were probably precious stones or flat objects that God used to give guidance to his people. The high priest kept them in a pouch attached to his breastpiece. Some scholars think the Urim may have been the no answer and the Thummim the yes answer.

After a time of prayer for guidance, the priest would shake one of the stones out of the pouch, and God would cause the proper one to fall out. Another view is that the Urim and Thummim were small flat objects, each with a yes side and a no side. The priest spilled both from his pouch. If both landed on their yes sides, God's answer was positive. Two no sides were negative. A yes and a no meant no reply. [This sounds similar to the game of Two-Up played by Australian soldiers on ANZAC day]. God had a specific purpose for using this method of guidance - he was teaching a nation the principles of following him. Our situation is not the same, however, so we must not invent ways like this for God to guide us.

The use of the Urim and Thummim would be the usual way that God would direct the nation of Israel for most of their history before they would eventually go into captivity.

In Exodus 33:11 we read: “So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” This regular direct face-to-face relationship or friendship that God (i.e. Jesus Christ - 1 Corinthians 10:4) had with Moses was virtually unique during the time of the Old Testament and must have something which He must have truly treasured. Even Abraham did not share this kind of relationship with God on a regular basis. His direct face-to-face meetings with God were very rare.

"Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle...Then He said, 'Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings and he sees the form of the LORD’” (Numbers 12:5-8).

Why does God seem to hide Himself? Why does He not directly speak to us? To help answer that question I’d like to quote from Klyne Snodgrass, author of “Between Two Truths”:

**How much is God responsible for what happens? Does he act directly or only indirectly?** People usually hold one of two positions on this subject: Either they believe that God is in control and manipulates events to punish or bless people, or they believe that God created the world, wound it up like a clock, and has gone off somewhere to let it run on its own... Although not many Christians...live their lives as if God is not really involved in our world...

People like certainty. But the Christian life is a life of faith—not sight. Humility and caution are required as we analyse what happens in our world. We cannot avoid interpreting events, but we must remember that our conclusions are based on partial
understanding. If a tornado skips a church and destroys a bar, should we conclude that the tornado was sent as a judgment of God? What do we say if the tornado hits the church and misses the bar? That God wanted us to build a larger church? The tensions in the Bible keep us from drawing what seem to be the ‘obvious’ conclusions...The prophet Isaiah bluntly states that God’s ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts; in fact, God’s ways are higher than ours as much as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:8-9)...

**God is present and active among His people**...The whole Old Testament testifies that God is active, that he calls, leads, and empowers his people. God is presented as Lord over the history of all peoples. Nations are presented as instruments by which God accomplishes his purpose, as when Assyria is used to punish Israel (Isaiah 10:5-11) or when the Persian king, Cyrus, is raised to deliver them (Isaiah 44:28-45:13).

In the New Testament the risen Christ promised, ‘I am with you always, even to the end of the world’ (Matthew 28:20). The book of Acts emphasizes the activity of God's Spirit in the spreading of the gospel. Acts 17:27-28 also affirms that God is not far from any person, for in him we all live, move, and have our being...

**The God of the Bible is a hidden God.** If God exists, why doesn’t he go ahead and prove it to everybody? Yet Isaiah describes God as hidden: ‘Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Saviour of Israel’ (Isaiah 45:15 NIV)...

Why does God remain hidden, No doubt, one reason is that God's holiness is too great for humans to endure. Another reason may be that for God to have authentic relations with people, there must be freedom; if God forces himself on us by overwhelming acts, then we are compelled into a relationship with him. Dostoyevski said, ‘Thou wouldst not enslave man by a miracle and didst crave faith given freely, not based on miracle.’ God does not coerce; he invites. To preserve human freedom he will even let people do the opposite of His desires and even let them abuse others. Because of human free will, God has chosen to veil his presence. He does not want automatons.

In science fiction movies the more advanced a species is, the more cryptic and laconic their speech is. There does seem to be an element of truth in God being this way as well. Many of the Old Testament prophecies have an element of this in being quite cryptic at times. We often ask why doesn’t God plainly show me what to do but at the same time God wants us to use our minds and stretch ourselves to do the best that we can and learn from our circumstances. That’s why He doesn’t just give us all the answers though there are times when He does plainly tell us much, such as much of Jesus’ plain teaching to His disciples.

**God Nearly Kills All the Israelites**

In Exodus 32 we read: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' And the LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.'

"Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: 'LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty
hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in
the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and
relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom
You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven;
and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' So
the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people” (verses 7-14).

God (i.e. the God member who would become Jesus Christ) wanted to destroy Israel. This was no bluff.
He would have killed them all and started all over again if it wasn't for Moses entreat ing Him. What
must have the Father thought when He saw His son "lose His temper"? In effect He said: "I'VE HAD I
with these rotten people. Get out of my way so I can kill them all and I’ll start all over again with you."
The use of "your" people, not my people, showed that He was so displeased with them that He
emotionally disowned them.

He told Moses to leave Him alone and yet we see great courage and selflessness on Moses’ part by
disobeying that directive and entreat ing God humbly offering a good logical case to God to let them
live.

Moses said that the other nations would speak ill against Him saying that He brought them out to only
kill them in the wilderness. Would God have made a mistake if He followed through on His threat to
destroy them? Not necessarily. There can often be several different ways to achieve His purpose which
may all have equal merit. Moses’ boldness and courage in the way he presented a good logical case
moved Him enough to relent from following through on His threat to kill them all except for Moses.
Moses cared more for the people who didn’t deserve it than he did for the “honour” of being the
patriarch of a new nation God proposed to raise up through him.

What would have happened to the promises to Ephraim and Manasseh about them being a nation and
a company of nations if Israel was all were wiped out? Unlike the birthright promises to Abraham, the
promise of a nation and a company of nations to come from Ephraim and Manasseh was presumably a
conditional rather than unconditional promise based on their obedience. Such was probably true of
the promise spoken of by Jacob that Judah would be the sceptre tribe.

Some might accuse God of being violent, impatient and unmerciful by wanting to kill all of Israel at this
time but we need to remember God’s long-term perspective. God "kills and makes alive” (1 Samuel
2:6). He has the power over life and death. He can kill people and hand out the death penalty for sins
but He can and will resurrect them in the second resurrection for their first true opportunity at
salvation. In one sense His actions could be considered a merciful thing to do. Rather than continue
their immoral path they would, in the next second of their consciousness, come up in the second
resurrection (Ezekiel 37:1-14, Revelation 20:5). At that time God the earth will be a glorious place
and Satan will finally have been cast into the lake of fire never to influence mankind again. At that time
He will be able to go straight to work converting their minds and giving them His Holy Spirit which He
denied them at this time to teach humanity a vital lesson.

"Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, ‘You have committed a great sin. So
now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.’ Then Moses returned to the
LORD and said, 'Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of
gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have
written.’ And the LORD said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.’”
(Exodus 32:30-33).

Moses showed a tremendous love towards the rebellious Israelites and great selflessness in being
prepared to give up his chance of eternal life if God would forgive them. God must have been moved by
Moses’ willingness to die for the forgiveness of Israel but God wouldn’t let him.
"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people. And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned" (Exodus 33:1-4).

God was so upset with the rebellious Israelites that He said He would not personally take them up to the land of Canaan. Instead He would have them taken up to the land by an angel acting on His behalf.

"Then Moses said to the LORD, 'See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people.' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.' Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.' And He said, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' Then he said to Him, 'If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth.' So the LORD said to Moses, 'I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name'" (Exodus 33:12-17).

Moses disagreed with God’s decision not to personally go up with them to the land of Canaan. He did not want to be separated from God at that critical time of going up to Canaan. Like a friend humbly asking a favour of another friend he managed to persuade God to change His mind and personally go up with them to the land of Canaan.

Yet again we see God’s willingness to change His mind and do things our way if we boldly make our case to Him. As mentioned before there’s usually more than one path to achieve God’s overall plan. God’s will is important but He also wants to know our will and what we want. If we want to go a different path to the same overall goal, God will often be willing to change His mind if it is that important to us and we show the right attitude in approaching Him.

Moses had an intimate relationship with the God member who became Jesus Christ. Prior to His incarnation when He came to die for our sins this was the only regular face-to-face relationship He had with any human being since probably the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This would have been a very special relationship to Him. As a result of this intimate friendship He had with Moses He granted Moses a special favour which Moses had asked of Him. He had manifested Himself as a human being but Moses wanted to see Him as He really looked like normally in full blazing glory. We read of this in Exodus 33:18-23:

"And he said, 'Please, show me Your glory.' Then He said, 'I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.' But He said, 'You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.' And the LORD said, 'Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."

For all His incredible power what I find very interesting here is that God prefers to be known for His perfect character and the great love He has for His people. In Exodus 34:5-7 when He allowed Moses to see Him in His glorified state we read: "Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,
keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty”.

**Blessings and Cursings**

After giving His law and statutes to the nation of Israel God gave a list of blessings and curses that would come upon them depending on their obedience to His law and statutes.

“If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land. You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you.

“For I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm My covenant with you. You shall eat the old harvest, and clear out the old because of the new. I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” (Leviticus 26:3-12).

God yearns to shower His blessings on us. The kind of blessings that we might think of as extravagant are nothing compared to what God has and can offer us. The old covenant included promises of national wealth and prosperity. The new covenant includes far more generous promises such as the opportunity to be born into the very Family of God as a being on the God level of existence for all eternity.

God says that if they obeyed Him that He would set up His tabernacle among them and walk among them. His tabernacle and later the Temple of God was amongst them. Did Jesus as the Word of God literally walk among them? He appeared on a number of occasions to a number of God’s servants. Invisible, for the most part, it appears likely that He often did walk among them in His spirit form. Ultimately the Father yearns to do the same thing, something that will happen for the first time when the New Jerusalem descends to the earth.

Following the blessings came the curses. “But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you” (Leviticus 26:14-17).

To whom much is given much is required (Luke 12:48). God is a God of justice as well as mercy. Those curses, for the most part, are the simple cause and effect results of breaking God’s laws. A number of them, though, are specific punishments from God that He would add on top of them to get Israel’s attention so that they might repent and turn back to Him.

**God Sentences Israel to 40 Years in the Wilderness**

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.’ So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel...
"Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. Then they told him, and said: 'We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.' Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.'" (Numbers 13:1-3, 26-30).

All 12 spies agreed that the land truly was a good land that was very fertile. They said that it "flowed with milk and honey" which was possibly a reference to melted manna that fell in the rivers of Canaan according to some ancient references. They also reported that the land was well fortified and that the remnant of the race of giants lived there. Caleb, and later Joshua, would remind the people that they could take the land since God was on their side.

"But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.' And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, 'The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.' So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let us select a leader and return to Egypt'" (Numbers 13:31-14:4).

The other ten spies lacked faith that God would back them up and help them defeat the Canaanites. The discouragement had a profound effect on the faithless Israelites who had witnessed miracle after miracle from God and said let's find a leader who will take us back to Egypt.

"Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: 'The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them.' And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel. Then the LORD said to Moses: 'How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they'" (Numbers 14:5-12).

God was stunned at how pitiful their faith still was considering He had done so many miracles to provide for and deliver them. He had lost patience with them and again was set on killing them all and starting over again through Moses.

"And Moses said to the LORD: 'Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if You kill
these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness. And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now” (Numbers 14:13-19).

Moses uses the same argument that He used on God (i.e. the God member, Jesus Christ) at Mt Sinai after the Golden Calf rebellion to try and persuade God to not kill them so the other nations won't be able to say that He couldn't bring them into the land He had promised them.

"Then the Lord said: 'I have pardoned, according to your word; BUT truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord—because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it” (Numbers 14:20-23).

For a second time it actually worked and Moses persuaded God to not kill all the Israelites BUT there would still be a punishment for their rebellion and pitiful lack of faith.

"And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me.’ Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the Lord, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness”’ (Numbers 14:26-33).

The punishment for their rebellion would not be death as God originally planned but 40 years of wandering in the wilderness with the exception of Joshua and Caleb who had a faithful spirit which God delighted in and rewarded. It would only be their children who would go into the Promised Land.

"Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly. And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, ‘Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned!’ And Moses said, ‘Now why do you transgress the command of the Lord? For this will not succeed. Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the Lord is not among you. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the Lord, the Lord will not be with you.’ But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop; nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses departed from the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah” (Numbers 14:39-44).

God can be persuaded to change His mind but there comes a time when His decision is final no matter what we do. The Israelites recognized their sin of faithlessness and changed their mind about taking on the inhabitants of the land. Moses explained that God’s decision was final and not to go up since the Lord was not with them but again they would not listen to God. They tried to defeat the inhabitants of the land on their own but were beaten since God was not with them. God's decision was final. He would not allow Israel to be able to defeat them until the sentence of 40 years wandering had been served.
"Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, 'You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?' So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face; and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, 'Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him'” (Numbers 16:1-5).

Korah, who was a Levite but he was not of the house of Aaron from whom can only can come the priesthood. He spoke against Moses and wanted authority that was not his. He was joined in this rebellion by 250 elders.

"And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, 'We will not come up! Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us? Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!'

"Then Moses was very angry, and said to the LORD, 'Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them.' And Moses said to Korah, 'Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before the LORD—you and they, as well as Aaron. Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the LORD, two hundred and fifty censers; both you and Aaron, each with his censer.' So every man took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of meeting with Moses and Aaron. And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation. And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.' Then they fell on their faces, and said, 'O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?' So the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'” (Numbers 16:12-23).

For the third time God’s anger becomes so hot that He wants to destroy all the Israelites. Lucky for the Israelites they had such a caring leader in Moses who begs God to only strike the main instigators of the rebellion. God gives the congregation who had been stirred by the rebels the chance to withdraw from them.

"Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, ‘Lest the earth swallow us up also!’ And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense” (Numbers 16:31-35).

God opens us the earth and punishes the main instigators of this latest rebellion in the camp of Israel. Korah and his household along with many others are killed for their sins.

"On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of the LORD.' Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of
meeting. And the \textit{Lord} spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.’ And they fell on their faces. So Moses said to Aaron, ‘Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense \textit{on} it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the \textit{Lord}. The plague has begun.’ Then Aaron took \textit{it} as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped” \textit{(Numbers 16:41-50)}.

God cannot believe the people murmur against His punishment of Korah and the other rebels. For a fourth time He not only threatens to wipe out all the congregation of Israel but this time He actually begins the process with a terrible plague that starts going through the camp.

Moses’ longsuffering intervention for the people continues with great urgency this time as He sees God following through on His threat due to their extreme provocation. He tells Aaron to take a censer and make atonement for the people and to stand between the living and the dead. Their compassionate intervention and urgency moves God again to relent from the harm that He had begun this time around. Some 14 700 would pay the price for their incredible faithlessness and stubborn rebellion.

\textbf{The Original Mr Ed}

"Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. Then God’s anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the \textit{Lord} took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants \textit{were} with him. Now the donkey saw the Angel of the \textit{Lord} standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road. Then the Angel of the \textit{Lord} stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with \textit{a} wall on this side and a wall on that side. And when the donkey saw the Angel of the \textit{Lord}, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam’s anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff. Then the Angel of the \textit{Lord} opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, ‘What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?’ And Balaam said to the donkey, ‘Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!’ So the donkey said to Balaam, ‘\textit{Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?’ And he said, ‘No.’

"Then the \textit{Lord} opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the Angel of the \textit{Lord} standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. And the Angel of the \textit{Lord} said to him, ‘Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because \textit{your} way is perverse before Me. The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live.’ And Balaam said to the Angel of the \textit{Lord}, ‘I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back.’ Then the Angel of the \textit{Lord} said to Balaam, ‘Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak.’ So Balaam went with the princes of Balak” \textit{(Numbers 22:21-35)}.

The story of Balaam and the donkey is a good illustration of God’s sense of humour. The donkey saw the angel which Balaam didn’t see and turned around. Balaam stubbornly wanted to go forward and starts hitting the donkey. Before revealing the angel in his way to Balaam God indulges in a little humour by making the donkey speak to him the words the donkey may well have said if it was a sentient being like a human being. Balaam’s donkey was the original Mr Ed.
Balak, king of Moab, was frightened of the Israelites after what He had heard that God had done for them in freeing them from Egypt and destroying the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. He hired the services of a soothsayer by the name of Balaam to bring a curse on Israel. Balaam was greedy for the gold and silver on offer but realized that any curse he might utter to fall on Israel would make no difference at all since they were under the protection of the one and only true God.

It says in Numbers 24:2 that "the Spirit of God came upon him" and he began to give a prophecy inspired by God. Balaam was an unconverted soothsayer denounced in the New Testament by Peter (2 Peter 2:15) and Jude (Jude 11). What exactly happened here? This was probably the opposite of what happened to Pharaoh. In this case God's spirit overloaded his mind with impulses broadcast to his human spirit to do good and God used him temporarily to do His bidding. This is similar to something we'll see later when Saul and his messengers tried to take David from where Samuel was. They not only came back empty-handed but also came back prophesying for God (1 Samuel 19:18-24).

Like with Saul when he went back to his old carnal self after the experience, so too did Balaam. Balaam came up with a cunning idea before he left Balak. It is mentioned in the book of Revelation in the letter to the church in Pergamos, who had false ministers who did the same thing. The letter speaks of those who held "the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel" (Rev. 2:14). Numbers 31:16 mentions that the women of Midian, through Balaam's counsel, were asked to be that stumbling block to the men of Israel.

No outside force could destroy Israel with God protecting them but if the Israelites could be tempted to commit idolatry and immorality this might give God Himself reason to destroy Israel for their sins. The plan would have succeeded if it wasn’t for the actions of a man named Phinehas whose actions, not his words, persuaded God not to destroy Israel because of yet another rebellion.

**Phinehas was Zealous with My Zeal**

"Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel...And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel’” (Numbers 25:1-13).

When a great number of the men of Israel go off with the women of Moab to commit fornication and were persuaded to bow down to the Moabite gods God's anger is aroused yet again. This is the fifth time that He sets Himself to destroy all of Israel. There is no mention of God giving any forewarning to Moses in the account. God sends a plague through the camp of Israel. The fornication and idolatry was blatant enough sinful behaviour. When one man brazenly presented a Moabite woman to everyone in Moses’ sight, Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, takes a spear, charges after them and kills them both for their blatant sin.
God blessed him because of his zeal. He did not tolerate such blatant unfaithfulness to God showing the same great passion that God has. Because he stood up so boldly against such blatant sin God held back from destroying Israel. For their sin some 24,000 died. That figure would have been 100 times greater were it not for Phinehas’ righteous jealousy for God.

**God’s Faithfulness and Desire for Israel to Obey and to Prosper**

In Deuteronomy 2:5-7 we read: "Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. You shall buy food from them with money, that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them with money, that you may drink. For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing."

God had given the whole land from the Euphrates to the Nile River to the descendants of Abraham. The area of Palestine was promised by God to Jacob’s descendants but the tribes of Israel (Jacob) weren’t all there were to Abraham’s descendants. The descendants of Jacob’s brother, Esau, were given by God the land to the south-east of the Dead Sea near present-day Petra as a perpetual inheritance. Some of those descendants are the present-day Palestinians. The whole Arabian peninsula was also part of the land given to Abraham’s descendants and belong to the descendants of Isaac’s brother, Ishmael, who became the Arab peoples.

God faithfully provided them land as He would the tribes of Israel. God then speaks of His faithful provision of Israel for the whole of 40 years in the wilderness and how they lacked for nothing. In Deuteronomy 29:5-6 we read:

"And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet. You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or similar drink, that you may know that I am the LORD your God."

Even down to the smallest detail God provided for them. God made sure that their clothes and shoes did not wear out in all that time. The reason they did not eat bread is because God had them move so regularly that they did not have time to plant crops and harvest grain for bread. This would continue to emphasize both their dependence on God as well as His faithful provision to them in such difficult circumstances.

The wilderness experience would help strengthen the faith of the next generation of Israelites who God would bring into the Promised Land to help counter the weak example of their parents. The faith of that next generation was lacking to the effect that they were only able to drive out most of the Canaanites but left a good many of them in the land to where they became a thorn in their side for many generations to come. However, they were faithful enough for God to commend them with the following words in Joshua 24:31: "Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel."

Before they were to cross over into the Promised Land Moses recalled the events of the last 40 years to them and spoke of just how special a thing it was for God to have such a personal involvement in the affairs of their fledgling nation.

"Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him. Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you
heard His words out of the midst of the fire. And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power, driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land as an inheritance, as it is this day. Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time” (Deuteronomy 4:33-40).

After Moses recalled these things He speaks of something that the Lord had said to him previously:

"Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29).

You can hear in those words a deep yearning from God for them to obey and for life to go well for them. Moses then spoke again of God’s special selection of them as a nation for a purpose that would benefit all of humanity:

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them" (Deuteronomy 7:7-11).

God didn't want to take on a mighty nation else they might think what they had was of their own hands. By taking a fledging people trapped in captivity and bringing them out it would show to the other nations that God was the one guiding and blessing the nation. The above verses also speak of God’s faithfulness – when He has given His word that He will do something He will follow through on His word no matter how unlikely or impossible the circumstances might look. They also speak of His justice – blessing those who obey Him and cursing those who hate and disobey Him.

Moses says further on in Deuteronomy 9:19: “For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you. But the LORD listened to me at that time also.”

God listened to Moses and He is open to changing His mind. If we want to go a different path to the same overall goal, God will often be willing to change His mind if it is that important to us and we show the right attitude in approaching Him.

"But the land which you cross over to possess is...a land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year” (Deuteronomy 11:12).

We see here that God cares for the land and His eyes are on it. The land of Palestine is a special place, particularly because of the history of God’s people in the land. It’s hard not to get caught up in the specialness of Jerusalem when one visits the city and walks through the cobblestone streets of the old city and stands on the Mount of Olives where Christ will one day return. There may be more attractive and green places in the world but the land of Palestine and the city of Jerusalem are special because of
their history. The present-day Jews have shown a great deal of pride and care in the land of Palestine over the last 50 years and have transformed many parts of the land from a wasteland to a beautiful, green, fertile land. God wanted for them to care for the land as He does physically. Also, He didn’t want them polluting or defiling the land because of immorality and violence. In **Numbers 35:33-34** we read:

“So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the L ORD dwell among the children of Israel.”

In **Deuteronomy 29:29** Moses writes: "The secret things belong to the L ORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

There are many secrets that belong to God. Throughout the Bible there are many mysteries that many of us yearn to know about but we’ll have to wait until God’s Kingdom comes and He chooses to reveal those things to us. None of those, of course, are critical to salvation. God would be unfair in not revealing them clearly to us if they were essential for salvation.

Many of the mysteries of space and time and the spirit world are out of our reach at this time to understand but as the verse says we do have the heritage of those things which are revealed to us. That includes God’s great spiritual laws which tell us what works and what doesn’t in life. The knowledge God has revealed to us at this time is precious.

“**The L ORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the L ORD will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of the L ORD your God**” *(Deuteronomy 30:9-10)*.

God rejoices over His people. He might be disenchanted with His kids for a while but He truly rejoices in us when we obey Him. How much pleasure does God have with His church when it’s on track doing the Work? Do we get excited about and share the same pleasure God shows in His work of bringing the good news to others as He has commissioned the church at this time?

**I Have Set Before You Life And Death, Therefore Choose Life**

Towards the end of Moses' address to the nation in the book of Deuteronomy we read: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the L ORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the L ORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; *(Deuteronomy 30:15-19)*.

God gives us a choice to follow Him or not. He does not force us to obey Him. If He did we would not build true character. In his book "Between Two Truths" Klyne Snodgrass writes the following:

”There is a big difference between God’s permitting events and His causing them. If God causes evil, he must be held accountable for it. If he permits evil, the responsibility for it is placed on the free will of the persons doing it. We may question why God values free will so much, but there is no doubt that he does.”
“Being human means being responsible for our actions and being subject to the actions of others. Our neighbour has the free will to commit murder, and we could well be the victim of his free will. To be human means to be a resident of the old age where sin (ours and others’), suffering, tragedy, and death are all commonplace. God created the world, willing to chance what free human beings would do. God may be responsible for allowing such a world to exist, but He is not directly responsible for all the events that take place” (p.146).

God highly values free moral agency and He gives us the choice to obey or not but He deeply desires for us to choose His way of life so that we can live a good life. God ultimately wants free sons who serve Him voluntarily not "slaves" to righteousness.

We are led by God’s spirit (Romans 8:14). God’s spirit doesn’t force us to do anything but it does work with our conscience as that still small “voice” from God that helps motivate us to do the right thing. There’s a battle that goes on in our minds all the time. God’s spirit will motivate us to be patient with some guy who’s really giving us a hard time. If we say “I know I should be patient with this guy but...” and then we act on the but we have poured a little bit of water on the spirit. The more we do that the more we quench God’s spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We need to act on the first part that tells us to do the right thing and ignore the but whatever if we are to grow in God’s character and have more of God’s spirit.

The reason we have this struggle is because, even though we are often at the academic level convinced that sin hurts, we often waver in our belief deep down in our hearts that sin is bad for us and is going to hurt us. Deep down we believe that the benefits of whatever sin we are enticed outweigh the hurt that it will produce.

Paul acknowledged that there is pleasure in sin when he wrote that Moses gave up "the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25). The passing pleasures, as Paul calls them, that are in sin inevitably lead to kickbacks which hurt more than the pleasure.

Satan’s subtlety and deception is in regularly being able to convince us into looking at sin from a selective viewpoint - focusing on the pleasure more than the inevitable kickback that follows just around the corner.

Sin often has a short-term pleasure and long-term pain. God's way most of the time has short-term and long-term pleasure but sometimes it involves short-term pain with long-term pleasure - eg. a young man having to wait until marriage for sex.

One reason why we vacillate between doing what is right and wrong is that we tend to take a gambling perspective. Ron Dart puts this very well in an article called "True Conversion" where he writes:

'I call heaven and earth to record this day against you,' said God through Moses, ‘that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life that both you and your seed may live' (Deuteronomy 30:19). What this means is that God has left it within our power to choose death. But why would we do a thing like that? Who, knowing the choice he is making, would choose death?

I suspect it is because most of us think that we are only taking a chance with death. We would not deliberately choose death over life, but we will gamble with death in order to pursue what we want.

Everyone knows that, across the averages, smokers die much younger than non-smokers. But, we say to ourselves, there are exceptions. Perhaps there is something else at work. Maybe I can beat the odds.
After making that choice very clear to the nation of Israel “the LORD said to Moses: ‘Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day…Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them” (Deuteronomy 31:16-21).

God knew that Israel would break their covenant. He knew the inclination of their heart and that they lacked the moral strength to faithfully throughout all their generations. With every advantage that God could possibly given them, short of His Holy Spirit, they would be God’s guinea pig to the rest of the world to teach humanity the lesson that only through the power of His Holy Spirit could they truly obey Him.

In Deuteronomy 32:9-10 we read the following about God’s deep love for Israel: “Jacob is the place of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.”

**Israel Becomes a Nation of War**

God never intended for Israel to be a waring people. It was unnecessary for Israel to arm themselves and wage war. God promised to fight their battles for them as He did at the crossing of the Red Sea. In his booklet "Military Service and War" Herbert W. Armstrong writes:

Amalek, a Gentile king, came against the Israelites in great strength with an invading army...Moses, at the end of his patience trying to induce these stubborn, rebellious people to believe in and trust God, said to Joshua, ‘Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek’ (Exodus 17:9). Lacking the faith to trust God for their protection, Moses feared they would be slaughtered. Although Moses weakened and gave the order for war, it was the people themselves who actually made the decision for war, by their utter lack of reliance on God...

Even though God allows humans to make their own decisions—allows them to sin—allows nations to go to war—nevertheless God’s purpose must stand! His purpose was to settle these descendants of Abraham in the land he had promised Abraham—the Promised Land...It was God’s responsibility to place these people in the Promised Land, driving out the inhabitants. It was Israel’s responsibility to decide how this would be done—whether to rely on God to do the fighting, driving out the illegal inhabitants, or to arm themselves, fight, and engage in war...These Israelites did not need to fight! So it was because of Israel’s faithlessness and disobedience [Exodus 17, Deuteronomy 1] that God allowed them to sin by taking up arms. And therefore God used them as His instruments in driving out the nations illegally in their land” (p.29-33).

Rather than obeying God and letting Him fight their enemies for them they later demanded a king in the time of Samuel who could pull together a permanent, standing army that could repel their enemies. God allowed this situation even though He would have fought their enemies for them if they later chose to repent and trust Him to fight those enemies. We have three instances where kings of Judah did so in Asa (2 Chronicles 14:9-13), Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:1-30) and Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:14-37). Saul and David gave the people what they wanted – they fought the enemies of the nations with the permanent armies they had drafted and God blessed their efforts in freeing Israel from their enemies and expanding the Israeliite empire from the Euphrates to the Nile, even though a permanent army was never God’s intention for Israel.
In Romans 3:5-6 speaking of God the Apostle Paul writes: “Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?” When dealing with sin and carnal people who stubbornly persist in being violent to others God has to inflict hurt to stop evil doers and humble them to the point that they might willingly turn to Him. If we think of evil, not as sin, but as adversity and harm as it originally meant, then inflicting hurt on others is a necessary evil that God must do at times. In his book “The Institutes of Biblical Law” R.J. Rushdoony writes:

All Canaanites were devoted to death. The criterion was not enmity to Israel but the law of God. Egypt was an enemy of God as was Canaan, but the iniquity of the Canaanites was "full" or total in God’s sight (Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:24-28, etc.). Prostitution and homosexuality had become religious practices to the point where the people were entrenched in depravity and proud of it. Their iniquity was "full" or total. Accordingly, God sentenced them to death and made Israel the executioner...

The common humanistic view is that such a law is pitiless. The Biblical perspective is that it is not, that, in fact, the modern perspective reflects not pity, but misplaced pity. Shall the criminal or the community be pitied? The Biblical law demands pity for the offended, not the offender.

Pity, in fact, is specifically forbidden as evil in certain cases. Obviously, in the law concerning the delinquent son, pity for the son is forbidden. But in other laws pity is specifically cited as forbidden:

And thou shalt consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee (Deuteronomy 7:16)...

In Deuteronomy 7:16, pity for the evil inhabitants of Canaan was forbidden; God’s pity for them, and His patience, had lasted for centuries. Now the time for pity was gone: it was a time for judgment and death...

Pity must also move in terms of law, or it becomes the condonation of evil. Whether a wife, husband, or son be involved, pity must never become lawless...

By requiring capital punishment for incorrigible criminals, the law eliminated the enemies of godly society, it purged them from society. This is the killing side of the law. On the other hand, by requiring restitution of other significant offenders, and corporal punishment (the stripes) of minor offenders, the law worked to restore man to society, to cleanse and to heal...

Those who seek to avoid all injury, all killing, as a means of creating a new world only succeed in giving the victory to evil. Their tender mercies are cruelty, and by giving life to evil they bring death to society. Only by faithfully observing God’s mandate to kill and to make alive according to His law-word can man establish dominion over the earth and accomplish the required task of restoration (p.93, 188-190, 215-216, 253).

Norm Edwards makes these comments about the task that God set before Israel to utterly destroy the inhabitants of Canaan:
Some of the tasks God set before Israel were most unpleasant! Because of the bloody sins of the degenerate races inhabiting the lands of Palestine and its environs, God gave ancient Israel charge to utterly exterminate various of the tribal groups inhabiting these countries, such as the Hivites, Jebusites, Perizzites, the Philistines and others. Why?

Because these degenerate, evil people were guilty of human sacrifice, perversion of every kind, idolatry, and were the carriers of terrible and dreaded scourges and diseases. Blindness, deafness, dumbness, venereal disease, leprosy—every hideous disease imaginable—was rampant among them as a result of their utter disregard for the simplest principles of cleanliness, chastity or obedience to the laws of God (O How Love I Thy Law, Servants News, 1996).

It must, of course, be remembered that those who would die at the hands of the Israelites by God’s decree will, in the next second of their consciousness come up in the second resurrection when Christ will rule the whole world and they will immediately have the opportunity to repent and receive God’s spirit and live God’s way—the only true way to peace and happiness. "The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up" (1 Samuel 2:6). God kills and makes alive—He will resurrect these people later on.

What must it have been like to have to do horrible things to people and kill them in executing God’s justice? God is called a man of war in Exodus 15:3. It would have been terribly painful, though necessary, to follow through on killing these people.

**The Conquest of the Promised Land**

"Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year (Joshua 5:10-12).

He again we see God’s faithful provision to the Israelites with manna for forty years in the wilderness. The time had finally come for them to “settle down” and God allowed them to settle down long enough to plant crops so that they would have bread produced from harvested grain to keep the Passover on the eve of beginning the conquest of the Promised Land.

"And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, ‘Are You for us or for our adversaries?’ So He said, ‘No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant?’ Then the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, ‘Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.’ And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13-15).

Here the preincarnate Jesus Christ appears to Joshua to strengthen his courage and to advise them how to proceed with the conquest of the first major city, Jericho.

"Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said to Joshua: ‘See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when you hear the sound
of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him” (Joshua 6:1-5).

God had performed the miracle of drying the Jordan River for the Israelites to cross dryshod and to strengthen and encourage their faith and belief in Him. Now would come another mighty event that would strengthen their faith – the walls of Jericho falling down by themselves.

Some have suggested that the long blast of the ram’s horn (perhaps for a few minutes) combined with the great shout of all the people had the same physical effect as a long high-pitched note sung by an opera singer shattering a crystal glass. Whether these actions, combined with natural laws of physics and sympathetic vibration, did cause the walls to shatter and fall down or not, it certainly would have had the appearance of a miracle to the Israelites.

The attack on Jericho was a great success with the Israelites capturing the city. Over the next six years God would help the Israelites to conquer most of the Promised Land. God must have had rejoiced that His chosen people were now inhabiting the Promised Land. However that joy was also mixed with sadness and anger. A lack of faith in the end on the part of the Israelites after a few gruelling years of war would mean that not all of the land would be conquered.

"Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. So the LORD was with Judah. And they drove out the mountaineers, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron. And they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had said. Then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak. But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day…"

"Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out. Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer…Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute.

"Nor did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Acco or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob…Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth Anath; but they dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them. And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley; and the Amorites were determined to dwell in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim; yet when the strength of the house of Joseph became greater, they were put under tribute” (Judges 1:18-35).

God’s anger (described here as hot) at their lack of faith in Him to help them finish the job and drive out all the inhabitants is spoken of in Judges 2:

"Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: ‘I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.’ So it was, when the Angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept…"
“Then the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He said, ‘Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the LORD, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not.’ Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua (verses 1-4, 20-23).

The Time of the Judges

‘So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel...When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do so. And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way” (Judges 2:7-19).

The book of Judges shows that Israel's prosperity and existence depended on their obedience to God. After the conquest of the land we begin to see a monotonous cycle of disobedience, captivity, crying out to God for deliverance and then God raising up a judge to deliver them.

Over the course of 350 years between the conquest and when the people cried out for a human king like the other nations there were seven periods of captivity. Through association with the Canaanites they did not drive out, many Israelites were influenced to worship Baal and his consort Asherah. They either mixed worship of the true God with pagan idolatry as God told them not to do (Deuteronomy 12:29-31) or they forsook God altogether. This idolatry and the evil works they did in the process greatly angered God.

God commends the Israelites who were involved in the conquest by mentioning that they, for the most part, obeyed Him during the days of Joshua and the elders who outlived him. Another generation that did not know God rose up after them. This generation was not taught well enough by their parents. They did not personally know God or had experienced the great events where God was instrumental in providing for them in the wilderness and helping them conquer the land. They would be the first of a number of generations of Israelites that God would allow to be conquered by their neighbours to humble them and bring them back to Him. God's anger, though, was tempered by mercy in that fact that they had five times the number of years of peace as they did in captivity.
God’s Works Wonders Through Gideon

One of the greatest of the judges was Gideon. God would transform him from a fearful man to one of faith and courage and God would deliver Israel with an incredibly ingenious plan that worked a great miracle in Israel. At the start Gideon is a timid man of an insignificant clan. God showed patience and belief in Gideon’s potential with God’s help. God can often see extraordinary potential in ordinary people and is a master in bringing out the best in people. Gideon struggled in his faith and asked God for a sign which we read of in Judges 6.

“So Gideon said to God, ‘If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said—look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.’ And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, ‘Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.’ And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground” (verses 36-40).

God was patient and generous with both of Gideon’s requests. Even though he felt the need for a second sign, to Gideon’s credit, he showed great faith following that and didn’t falter in his faith when God whittled down his army to a mere 300 men. The UCG Bible Reading Program has these things to say about the story of Gideon:

Our introduction to Gideon is somewhat humorous. He is threshing wheat not out in the open on a threshing floor as would normally be the case, but hidden in a winepress out of fear of the Midianites stealing the grain from him. Yet this divine Messenger’s first words to fearful Gideon are, “The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!” (verse 12). “Both statements seemed absurd. First of all, where was the God of Israel? Second, anyone with eyes to see could know that he was no mighty man of valor. Gallant generals and fearless warriors did not hide from the enemy in winepresses” (Phillip Keller, Mighty Man of Valor, 1979, p. 25). But God often refers to people according to what they will become.

Gideon certainly didn’t come across as mighty or valorous initially, but by believing and trusting in God, he ultimately lived up to the confidence God placed in him and truly became a mighty warrior, a man of valor. Interestingly, the name Gideon itself actually meant “Hewer,” “Feller” or “One Who Cuts Down,” perhaps implying an overcomer. And after God’s calling, Gideon would begin fulfilling the meaning of his name...

While the Spirit of the Lord had come upon Gideon, he had as yet developed little faith. He required another sign from God that God would truly deliver Midian into his hands. While this was probably for his own sake, he may also have felt it necessary for the Israelites to know, with the evidence of such signs, that God had chosen him to fight the battle. In any event, God did perform the famous fleece signs. Gideon, we can see, was still used to walking by sight, not faith. Nevertheless, the success of his enterprise was not to come from his strength but God’s. The signs were given, and Gideon was emboldened.

The army that Gideon gathered numbered 32,000 men, too large for God’s purposes. If the battle had been engaged, Israel would have attributed the success of the battle to their large numbers. Therefore, God set about paring down the force. First, those who were afraid of battle would be dismissed. That left 10,000 soldiers. Still too many. So God instructed Gideon to bring the army down to a stream or pool. There
Gideon was to separate the men into two groups—those who scooped water in their hand and brought it to their mouth, and those who got down on all fours to drink by placing their face in the water. Those who scooped the water numbered 300, and those were the men God chose.

As to why God chose this method, we simply do not know. However, being such an unusual occurrence, it is deserving of a comment here. The Nelson Study Bible offers a note on this division, the merits of which you may judge for yourself: "Some commentators have suggested that the men who did not get down on their knees were maintaining a higher degree of military readiness by drinking out of their hands. However, they may be reading too much into the account, for the text does not indicate any reason for Gideon's preference. The reference to the way a dog laps might even be derogatory since dogs were despised creatures in the ancient world [as they were considered worthless scavengers] (1 Samuel 17:43; 2 Kings 8:13; Matthew 7:6). If so, God's role in the victory becomes even more apparent, since the three hundred who were left were the ones who did not even have the common sense to drink in a normal fashion. God's comment in v. 7 seems to reinforce this suggestion" (note on Judges 7:4-5). Still, others stress the alertness of a dog as a positive. Whatever the reason, we are still left with an incredible miracle of winning with only 300 men.

When the battle was engaged by night, Gideon gave every man a torch, a clay pitcher and a horn. As the troops dispersed in the night, descending on the Midianites in the valley, Gideon gave the sign. The horns blew, the pitchers were broken, the torches flared and a great shout was made—all simultaneously. This was an important stratagem. Normally only the commander of a body of men would have a horn and a torch, so the sound of 300 horns and the sight of 300 torches made it appear that Israel had a very large army. Moreover, the sound of 300 clay pitchers breaking simultaneously would have carried down the valley walls sounding like the clanking of military armor. The valley walls would also have caused the noises to amplify. The sight of the torches and sound of the Israelites’ horns and shouting terrified the Midianites, who imagined a huge army bearing down on them. It was every man for himself, most fleeing without their armor or battle gear, thus becoming even easier prey for Gideon and his little band. In the confusion, the Midianites, Amalekites and Mesopotamians even slaughtered each other in the dark in their panic and desperation. So God, by the most insignificant man in Manasseh leading an insignificant troop, wrought a great victory for Israel. And there was peace for 40 years...

Gideon's story presents the first signs of a yearning for kingship in Israel. As previously stated, most of the real governmental power in Israel at the time was in the hands of the elders of the various tribes, and the tribes tended to look to their own interests, even when the national fortune or honor was at stake. The repeated cycle of servitude and deliverance began to expose the weakness of the tribal confederacy as it then existed and to awaken a desire for a more powerful central government. Sadly, the repeated cycle of servitude and deliverance did not impress on the Israelites the need for fidelity to God and the covenant. That was the lesson they should have learned. But men seldom blame their own evil hearts, preferring rather to blame "the system."
God Takes Revenge on Abimelech

Gideon had a weakness that we would later also find in David and Solomon, that of having many wives which was something that God had forbidden of kings who would later rule Israel (Deuteronomy 17:17). This set up a tragic story.

"So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. Thus the children of Israel did not remember the L ORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel. Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, 'Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I am your own flesh and bone.' And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him. Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone" (Judges 8:33-9:5).

Again Israel betrays God by forgetting what He had done for the nation and by turning to false gods. They also were not kind to Gideon's household. What was worse was what one of the 70 plus sons of Gideon would do to his brothers by betraying them and having them all killed except for Jotham who was lucky enough to escape.

In his rebuke to the men of Shechem on top of Mount Gerizim he speaks of “wine which cheers both God and men” (Judges 9:13). For most people alcohol in moderation is a blessing which has a physiological effect of lifting worries from the mind and cheering up one's heart. There have been times when Jesus during His life and in His pre-incarnate form would have enjoyed wine.

God in His anger toward Abimelech later on took vengeance on him for what he had done in killing all his brothers.

"God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, that the crime done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers... Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it. But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women—all the people of the city—fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower. So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire. But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, 'Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.' So his young man thrust him through, and he died. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place. Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal" (Judges 9:23-24, 50-57).

God Gets Sick and Tired of Delivering Israel

"Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the L ORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the L ORD and did not serve Him. So the anger of the L ORD was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of
the people of Ammon. From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years—all the children of Israel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead. Moreover the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan to fight against Judah also, against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed. And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!"

"So the LORD said to the children of Israel, 'Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand. Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress'" (Judges 10:6-14).

God allows another oppression of Israel after yet another rebellion of Israel where they yet again had turned to other gods. The fact that they cried out to God shows that they were probably mixing pagan religion with worshiping the true God and that deep down they realized only the true God could free them, not the pagan gods that they were also worshiping.

God really shows His emotions here and tells them that He is sick and tired of them betraying Him. He basically then says to them, "I had enough of you rebelling against me. I will no longer deliver you. Cry out to your other gods and see if they will deliver you."

"And the children of Israel said to the LORD, 'We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray.' So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel" (Judges 10:15-16).

God was probably partly moved to change His mind about not delivering them when He saw them following through on putting away their foreign gods and obeying His laws. What finally did it in the end to move Him to change His mind was the hurt that He felt seeing the misery that they went through at the hands of their oppressors who were very harsh to them. God's heart can be touched when He sees us in pain. "We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses" (Hebrews 4:15).

Samson

God delivered the Israelites in the east of the country from the Ammonites through Jephthah and those in the south and west of Israel from the Philistines by Samson, who was the son of Manoah.

"Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, 'Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.' So the woman came and told her husband, saying, 'A Man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name'…Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, and said, 'O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again'…Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, 'What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?' And the Angel of the LORD said to him, 'Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?'" (Judges 13:1-6, 8, 17-18).

The Angel of the Lord, who probably was the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, said that His name is wonderful. Jesus' name is also called Wonderful in Isaiah 9:6 where we read: "For unto us a Child is
God worked in time to deliver Israel from the Philistines. He had promised to Manaoh that Samson would be His instrument in delivering Israel even before he was born. God could have guided the conception so that genetically he would have had the temperament of someone who may have been quite an obedient child. In Samson's case it appears as if God did not do that. Samson was a very flawed man but God worked with Samson despite himself. He had a problem with lust and against God's will and his parent's wishes stubbornly chose to marry a Gentile woman named Delilah who would be a great thorn in his side.

In 1 Corinthians 14:32 Paul wrote that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets". God will work through individuals He has given His Holy Spirit to but He doesn't take away their free moral agency. Even those who have God's spirit can do some pretty horrible things at times for which they must repent of or lose His spirit if such rebellion against God's law were to persist. David's adultery and murder of Uriah almost cost him the Holy Spirit and had he not repented he would have gone the same way as his predecessor Saul. The UCG Bible Reading Program has this say about Samson:

God had been seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines (Judges 14:4). In itself, that is an interesting turn of phrase, for it implies that God works out His plans within the willing activities of men. God could have directly caused a thing to come to pass, but the Scripture says he sought an occasion. God often works in human events in this manner, interweaving His plans with those of men, bringing His will to pass by using the circumstances and individuals at hand. Thus, God works within the flow of history to accomplish certain ends without violating man's free will and often without producing an obvious trail of "miraculous" happenings. This does not, of course, mean that there is no evidence of miracles in history. The incredible strength of Samson alone would have been clearly miraculous to the people of his day—he carried massive city gates uphill for 40 miles! (16:3) The free will God allowed the Philistines is extended to all men—even those God specially uses. To break the Philistine tyranny over Israel, God would use a man, Samson, who had remarkable strengths coupled with regrettable weaknesses...

Samson's life as a deliverer for Israel stands in sharp contrast to the other deliverers God raised up for Israel. Despite such promising beginnings, Samson showed himself susceptible to being foolishly enticed by the world. God did not want the Israelites intermarrying with pagan gentiles, but Samson took a Philistine woman as his first wife. Also, Samson, as a Nazirite, should have avoided any uncleanness, but he took the honey from the carcass of the lion, which would have rendered the honey unclean (compare Leviticus 11:24-38). In short, Samson was a hardheaded man, but God would use that as a means of provoking the Philistines and delivering Israel.

The marriage of Samson, and the trickery that attended it, also shows that Samson was easily manipulated by the object of his desire. Neither his first, unnamed, wife, nor the woman Delilah would prove to be loving, faithful wives—but, rather, willing tools in the hands of the Philistine oppressors. Moreover, Samson seemed to be generally blind to their deceits. These kind of strange personal characteristics in a deliverer of Israel seem to be contradictory to the purposes of God. But in the case of Samson, God intended to use just such a man to seek an occasion against the Philistines (14:4). God can use the most unlikely of instruments to accomplish His purposes, even the very weaknesses and sins of men. If this is so with the weaknesses of God's servants, how much more when His servants purge themselves of sin and weakness and become truly holy and spiritually strong!
How would God have felt at the way that Samson lived his life? It must have quite frustrated him to see how hard-headed and foolish he was at times. I’ve known certain individuals with great talent and a lot of potential spiritually and have been saddened by how they have wasted that talent as they have strayed from God in their conduct. It hurts to see people with great potential and talent waste that potential.

**God’s Great Generosity**

In the next few books of the Bible we have three very interesting stories that show God’s generosity and how He will bless us over and above what we ask sometimes when He answers our prayers. These stories illustrate what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount when He said: “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” *(Luke 6:38).* When God reciprocates He will often give over and above what we expect. God takes great delight in giving when spiritually for our benefit it is fitting to do so.

In the beginning of the book of Ruth we read of Naomi who went to Moab with her two sons and their wives who were from Moab. Both the sons die and Naomi and her daughters-in-law decide to return to Judah at a time of famine. Naomi then implores them to return to their Moabite families. Ruth shows great loyalty and friendship to Naomi and insists on going with her whenever she goes. Naomi had thought that God had afflicted and abandoned her.

God went about rewarding Ruth’s loyalty and showing Naomi that He had not abandoned her. When Ruth goes out to the fields to glean for food God undoubtedly leads Ruth to the field of Boaz. He probably then moved Boaz to be generous to her by instructing his workers to leave extra behind. What she was able to glean was far more than typical gleaning could bring in. Naomi immediately recognizes that someone must have helped Ruth out *(Ruth 2:19).*

Not only does God faithfully provide extra food for Ruth and Naomi but begins to match up Ruth and Boaz romantically. In going over and above what Naomi and Ruth could have expected, the man God is bringing Ruth together with is a near kinsman who could redeem the family name and inheritance under the Levirate law. When Ruth tells Naomi who this generous landowner is and when she realizes the family connection she reasons that this was a development from God *(Ruth 2:20).* God had not abandoned her after all. In time, Ruth and Boaz would come together and marry and Boaz would redeem the family name and inheritance.

The second story of God’s generosity is in the life of Samuel’s mother, Hannah. Samuel’s father was a man named Elkanah. He had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah bore several children yet Hannah who was Elkanah’s favourite wife bore no children. Jealous of the fact that Hannah was the wife that Elkanah loved more Peninnah mocked Hannah quite a lot because she had no children. This depressed Hannah greatly and one time that they went up to Shiloh where the tabernacle of God was to sacrifice she prayed for a son. It was an intense sorrowful prayer from Hannah.

Hannah promised God that if she would give her a son she would give to God as a servant in the tabernacle. God was moved by her prayer and gave her a son. She showed great commitment and faithfulness to her vow to God by giving him back to God as a servant in the tabernacle. It would have been very hard giving him up but she stayed faithful to her promise. God was very touched by her faithfulness and gives her something well and truly over and above what she had asked for. “And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters” *(1 Samuel 2:21).* She had only asked for a son yet because of her faithfulness God gave her another five children.

The third story of God’s generosity over and above what someone has asked of God is the story of Solomon when he asks God for wisdom.
"At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you? And Solomon said: 'You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

"The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: 'Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days'" (1 Kings 3:5-14).

There are many other stories in the Bible we could add to highlight God's generosity. One other story in a later book of the Bible is that of Job. God allowed Job to go through hell for a while when He allowed Satan to take away everything that he had, his children, all of his property and to afflict him with boils from head to toe even though he had done nothing to deserve it and without so much as an idea as to why the trial came upon him.

After the trial was over and he had learned the lessons God wanted him to learn we read: "And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before...He also had seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first Jemimah, the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-Happuch. In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days" (Job 42:10-17). Not only did God restore what he had but God doubled what he had lost originally. No doubt the description of Job's new daughters as being the fairest looking women in all the land has had many bachelors wonder what they must have looked like.

**God is Rejected as King**

Coming back to the story of Israel, we come to the time of Samuel when the people of Israel are yearning for peace and security from their enemies and will trade some of their freedom for a more centralized government. In the process they will reject God as king over them.

Control over Israel was centralized under the leadership of Moses and Joshua who were judges under the king, who was God. After the conquest that centralization of authority they needed as the people were an army on the move was no longer needed after the conquest of the land. After the conquest of the land they had judges throughout the land, primarily in the cities of refuge. The government in the land appears to have been primarily local community government under a number of judges rather than a national government. There were judges and there was authority to convict those who thought that they could break the law with impunity.

This system worked very well in the early days after the conquest. Not only did Israel serve and obey God in the days of Joshua but also in the days of those elders who outlived Joshua. After that whenever they obeyed God, God blessed them and when they forgot God they had war and invasion from their
enemies. This cycle repeated itself over and over again until the Israelites had enough of it and wanted a different solution.

This is part of the story of man in general. In times of confusion and chaos the desire for order and peace and quiet becomes stronger and stronger in a people to the place where they are willing to lay down their freedom in order to have some kind of order and stability in their land.

They don't realize that the answer lies not in giving up some of their freedom which Israel did when they asked for a king but in the heart of man, of changing their ways and living by God’s laws and having those laws being enforced in a godly way by those appointed by God. Instead of collectively changing our ways and turning back to God as a people we start looking for a system, a method, for a governmental solution to our problems.

In 1 Samuel 8 we read the story of how the people were happy to serve under Samuel but they saw that he was getting old and his sons were disobedient and so the elders all got together with Saul and demanded of him that they have a king like the rest of the nations around them.

In effect, they said, "Our government system is not strong enough. It isn't centralized sufficiently to the point to where there is someone who has the power to pull together an army, to conscript soldiers, to defend us against our enemies who keep invading us from every side. We need a strong central authority. We want a king!” They would give up much of their freedom to have one.

God said, “They have rejected me as their king by asking for a human king” but God allowed them to have one and put certain limits on the king's authority while warning them of the freedoms they had given away and the consequences of having a human king.

God’s requirements of Israel, the burden He laid on them was light – a tithe with no IRS to demand it from them. In contrast He told them that a human king would conscript property, your sons and daughters, animals and another tithe on top of God’s tithe. You will become servants of your government rather than the government truly serving you.

God wanted a free, obedient and happy people free of the many burdens government puts on them and He would defend them from all their enemies. Other peoples would look at them thinking, "How can we be free from the burdens our governments put on us” and from that could spread the idea, “Hey, let's worship Israel's God. Let Israel's God be our king.” It was God's intent that the whole world be blessed through the descendants of Jacob.

The Gentiles could learn from them what it's like to live under God as their king instead of some power-hungry individual who took lots of their stuff, their youth and sent them forth to fight wars and got them killed on the battlefield and took their property and their crops and confiscated their land and gave it to their cronies. Man has always thought that he could govern himself without God.

When they cried out to Samuel for a king we read in 1 Samuel 8:6-9: "But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, ‘Give us a king to judge us.’ So Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day— with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.’”

God foretold that Israel would eventually ask for a king back in Deuteronomy 17 where He laid out some rules that any king that would later ask for would have to live by. Even though He knew that it
would happen. He knew that it would backfire on them and He yearned for them to have a light load compared to what a human king would do to them. It still hurt Him that they would reject Him as king.

King Saul

The man that God would choose for Israel as their king was Saul. God knew the type of person that the people were looking for in a king and He chose Saul. This choice would teach the people a lesson that impressive looks are deceiving. He was very tall and good looking (1 Samuel 9:2) but despite those strengths he was, surprisingly, a very insecure man. Throughout his life he struggled with feeling inferior, jealousy, fear of what men thought of him rather than what God thought, as well as impulsiveness and arrogance. Despite this major flaw of insecurity God gave him every opportunity to rise above his problem and be a successful king over Israel.

"So it was, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave [Saul] another heart; and all those signs came to pass that day. When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them. And it happened, when all who knew him formerly saw that he indeed prophesied among the prophets, that the people said to one another, ‘What is this that has come upon the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?’" (1 Samuel 10:9-11).

God gave His Holy Spirit to Saul. Like what can happen to us in the church today, he could lose it by rejecting God through persistent disobedience. This would happen later as his insecurities would lead him to great sins and a persistent disobedient attitude.

Usually, through the Holy Spirit, God only leads us through gentle promptings by His spirit on our conscience. This is because to build true character in us the good that we do needs to be by our consent. Sometimes though, for a purpose, God will overwhelm the human spirit of someone with urges to do good over and above what is normal and against what they might do normally. This kind of rare overwhelming of one’s spirit is what occurred here with Saul when he began to prophesy with the prophets.

After Saul is proclaimed King we read: “Saul also went home to Gibeah; and valiant men went with him, whose hearts God had touched” (1 Samuel 10:26). God here touches hearts of a number of valiant men to encourage Saul.

“Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against Jabesh Gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, ‘Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you.’ And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, ‘On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may put out all your right eyes, and bring reproach on all Israel.’ Then the elders of Jabesh said to him, ‘Hold off for seven days, that we may send messengers to all the territory of Israel. And then, if there is no one to save us, we will come out to you.’

“So the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the news in the hearing of the people. And all the people lifted up their voices and wept. Now there was Saul, coming behind the herd from the field; and Saul said, ‘What troubles the people, that they weep?’ And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh. Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused. So he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, ‘Whoever does not go out with Saul and Samuel to battle, so it shall be done to his oxen.’ And the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent. When he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand...So it was, on the next day, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and killed Ammonites until the heat of the day. And it happened that those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together” (1 Samuel 11:1-11).
Here God moves Saul’s heart to deliver Israel. He conscripts 330,000 men under penalty of the loss of livestock. The victory helped assure Saul’s acceptance as king. After this great victory came the first of his great major sins when he presumptuous offered a burnt offering before going to battle the Philistines.

"The Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and encamped in Michmash...Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. So Saul said, 'Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.' And he offered the burnt offering. Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him.

"And Samuel said, 'What have you done?' And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, ‘then I said, The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord. Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.' And Samuel said to Saul, 'You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you'" (1 Samuel 13:5-14).

God was willing to establish his dynasty forever if he rose above his insecurity problem and consistently obeyed Him yet he let his fear and impatience to get the better of him and do something he knew full well he should not have done in offering a sacrifice. Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin. If Saul stayed on track, God could have fulfilled the prophecy of the kingly line coming through Judah by intermarriage of Saul’s line with someone of the tribe of Judah. Because of Saul’s disobedience God goes out seeking a man after his own heart who we find out later would be David.

The next major sin would not only cost him his dynasty ruling after him but see him being rejected as king by God altogether.

"Samuel also said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. 'Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey' " (1 Samuel 15:1-3).

The time had come that God decreed that He would take vengeance on Amalek for their heinous attack on Israel when they came out from Egypt. God had not forgotten this act and now He decreed the time was right for justice to be meted out. Given the attack occurred nearly four hundred years earlier, God’s delay in punishing them may be similar to the way that He dealt with the Amorites / Canaanites in the land of Canaan – waiting for their sins to become full or complete.

"And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. Now the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, 'I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.' And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night" (1 Samuel 15:7-11).
God regrets appointing Saul as king. He was deeply saddened by Saul’s disobedience. Samuel showed great love and concern for him by the way that prayed to God all night about the situation. Saul had failed to obey God’s full instructions in the war against the Amalekites. The war was a great military success and, according to my research, liberated Egypt from 400 years of Hyksos domination, yet God did not view Saul as a military hero because He knew Saul’s heart wasn’t right.

"Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, ‘Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD.’ But Samuel said, ‘What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?’ And Saul said, ‘They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.’ Then Samuel said to Saul, ‘Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night.’ And he said to him, ‘Speak on.’

“So Samuel said, ‘When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?’ And Saul said to Samuel, ‘But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.’ Then Samuel said: ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king’” (1 Samuel 15:13-23).

God rejected King Saul for disobedience. Like many today, Saul preferred to do things his own way. He relied too much on his own human reasoning - apparently not realizing that the way that seems right to man often leads to death (Proverbs 16:25). He desired, pursued and trusted in physical things - the trappings of power and the desires of the flesh. Samuel says that God takes much more delight in us obeying Him than in offerings and sacrifices and that He hates rebellion and stubbornness putting those sins on par with witchcraft and idolatry. God looks on the heart – not on appearances. God warned Samuel not to make the same mistake that the people made by judging by appearances alone. When people judge by outward appearance they may overlook quality individuals who lack the physical or superficial qualities that society admires. Fortunately, God judges by faith and character (Isaiah 11:3-4), not by appearance. God can see what is in our hearts (1 Chronicles 28:9) and He can judge people accurately, often knowing people a whole lot better than they know themselves.

King David

After God’s rejection of Saul as king we read: “Now the LORD said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons’” (1 Samuel 16:1). God, in effect, tells Samuel: “Stop whining and let’s cut our losses. Move on and go and anoint someone else that I have chosen.”

“So it was, when they came [to Jesse’s place], that he looked at Eliab and said, ‘Surely the LORD’s anointed is before Him.’ But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:6-7).

God looks on the heart – not on appearances. God warned Samuel not to make the same mistake that the people made by judging by appearances alone. When people judge by outward appearance they may overlook quality individuals who lack the physical or superficial qualities that society admires. Fortunately, God judges by faith and character (Isaiah 11:3-4), not by appearance. God can see what is in our hearts (1 Chronicles 28:9) and He can judge people accurately, often knowing people a whole lot better than they know themselves.
Why was David called a man after God’s own heart and what can we learn about God heart from the way David lived his life? That famous description of David was said about him when he was still a teenage boy tending his father’s sheep. He must have had a fair degree of maturity as a teenager when God called him a man and not a boy after His own heart.

The first and dominant characteristic that motivated God to call him a man after his own heart was his wholehearted commitment and adoration of his Creator. He was a man who lived with great zest and devotion to God as one can see from reading the many Psalms which he composed. We can learn much from the passion that He had for God as we read them. God Himself has great passion and a zest for life.

As a young shepherd he discerned that the earth and the heavens were concrete evidence of a great Creator God. He was amazed when looked at the life, beauty and design he saw in the heavens and the world around him and was filled with great awe and respect for the God who created it all. He felt so humbled in comparison and gave his life over to doing God’s will completely and trusted in the God who could do anything. As a young boy he faithfully tended his father’s sheep putting his life on the line at times to do so fighting off a lion and a bear. From such circumstances he developed a courageous faith in God who he knew was the one delivered him, not his own skills.

Another quality about King David that made him like God was his concern for others. Christ told us in the Sermon on the Mount to love our enemies. King David showed the same concern for both his friends and those who opposed him. After ascending the throne, he actively sought to help the family of Saul. Although Saul had tried to kill him many times, David did not try to kill Saul or his family and he showed great kindness to Saul’s grandson, Mephibosheth which we read of in 2 Samuel 9.

A great example of David’s faith and courage was when he faced the giant Goliath who everyone else was afraid to go out and fight. “David said to Saul, ‘Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.’ Moreover David said, ‘The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine’” (1 Samuel 17:34-37).

God honoured David’s courage and faith by guiding his slingshot to perfectly strike and kill Goliath and allow Israel to win the battle. Following the battle we read: “Now when he [David] had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul…Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt” (1 Samuel 18:1-4).

This was the start of a beautiful friendship between David and Jonathan. Jonathan was not jealous of David and that David would have the throne instead of him. He accepted God’s will and judgment on Saul and was happy to serve under David. God must have delighted in Jonathan’s humble attitude and the wonderful friendship that Jonathan and David shared.

At the same time, it must have hurt God to see the way that Saul absolutely lost the plot and went down the path of jealousy and insanity. Fearing David would violently take the throne from him as David’s popularity rises above his own, Saul becomes homicidal and for several years pursues and tries to kill David.

“So David fled and escaped, and went to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth. Now it was told Saul, saying, ‘Take note, David is at Naioth in Ramah!’ Then Saul sent messengers to take David. And when they saw the group of prophets
prophesying, and Samuel standing as leader over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. And when Saul was told, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. Then Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also. Then he also went to Ramah, and came to the great well that is at Sechu. So he asked, and said, 'Where are Samuel and David?' And someone said, 'Indeed they are at Naioth in Ramah.' So he went there to Naioth in Ramah. Then the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on and prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he also stripped off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'”

(1 Samuel 19:18-24).

God can move us internally at will (Proverbs 21:1). Have you ever had the experience where you were in a good frame of mind and then you felt overwhelmed by bad impulses and ended up with a really foul attitude? I distinctly remember one time that it happened to me in a very freaky way. I feel that every now and then Satan may be allowed to overload our spirit with bad impulses to remind us of how easily it can happen without God’s restraint.

In like manner, God can overload us the opposite way if He chooses to. It's rare and only temporary if He does so because that would take away some of our free moral agency. This is what appears to have happened here with Saul and the messengers who went ahead of him on three separate occasions. They were far from thinking God's thoughts yet God moved them to desist pursuing David temporarily and to speak for God.

God would protect David for several years until Saul died and David became King over all of Israel. After conquering Jerusalem and making it his capital he decided to bring the ark of God up to Jerusalem.

"And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God. And David became angry because of the LORD's outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah to this day. David was afraid of the LORD that day” (2 Samuel 6:6-9).

David should have known better about how and who could transport the ark. God’s anger was aroused because of the negligence in obeying God’s instructions for transporting the ark. A much more serious breach occurred in the days before Saul was anointed king when the Philistines returned the ark after God had wreaked havoc on them for taking it.

Many of the men of Beth Shemesh had looked into the ark and some 50 070 men were struck by God (1 Samuel 6:19). God could not permit them to disregard His warnings and come into His presence lightly. He did not want the cycle of disrespect, disobedience and death to start all over again. He did not kill them to be cruel (remembering that they will rise again in the second resurrection) but because overlooking their presumptuous sin would encourage the whole nation to ignore God and His laws. It truly put the right kind of fear of God in the survivors. God wants us to be very careful and not careless in those things that He commands us to do. God doesn't want us to have a careless "near enough is good enough" attitude.

David's Adultery and Murder

David would be a great ruler of Israel and help extend the Israelite empire under God from the Euphrates to Egypt. However he will always be remembered for the most tragic episode in his life. He sinned greatly, when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. Worse still, David had Uriah killed in battle to cover his crime.
"When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when her mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

"Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: 'There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.' So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.'

"Then Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'

"Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from you own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 'For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.' So David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. 'However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die'" (2 Samuel 11:26-12:14).

What David had done greatly displeased God. David's anger at the fictional man in Nathan's parable illustrated the anger that God must have felt towards David. Not realizing he was the man, David had pronounced on himself the death penalty. God had laid a very clever trap to finally prick his conscience in this confrontation which would have happened close to a year after the initial adultery. God is a master at organizing circumstances to prick a person's conscience, even with some of the most stubborn individuals going around.

God showed mercy on him by not requiring his life when he accepted responsibility for his great sins. What David had done couldn't go unpunished. God had to make an example of him in his judgment to show that those in authority cannot abuse their power. It would encourage others in authority to abuse their power. God told David that since "by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die". He would lose his wives to another who shall lie with them and he would continue to have family problems. We cannot sin with impunity and expect no consequences if we are ruling over others.

Despite his terrible sins this sad story illustrates another important quality that made him a man after God's own heart. He accepted responsibility for his mistakes regardless of the consequences. He showed a willingness to accept responsibility for his actions and confess his sins. When confronted with these horrible sins, he made no excuses. Faced with the reality of transgressing God's law David said, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13).
In his famous prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 he prayed: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me...Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (verses 1-3, 10).

David Numbers Israel

David would rule well after this terrible tragedy with the exception of one more major sin when he numbered Israel which he should not have done where he was focusing on his own military strength and not on God (1 Chronicles 27:23).

"Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel. So David said to Joab and to the leaders of the people, 'Go, number Israel from Beersheba to Dan, and bring the number of them to me that I may know it'...And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He struck Israel. So David said to God, 'I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I pray, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.'

"And the Lord spoke to Gad, David's seer, saying, 'Go and tell David, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: 'I offer you three things; choose one of them for yourself, that I may do it to you.' So Gad came to David and said to him, 'Thus says the Lord: 'Choose for yourself, either three years of famine, or three months to be defeated by your foes with the sword of your enemies overtaking you, or else for three days the sword of the Lord—the plague in the land, with the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.' Now consider what answer I should take back to Him who sent me.' And David said to Gad, 'I am in great distress. Please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man.'

"So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel, and seventy thousand men of Israel fell. And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was destroying, the Lord looked and relented of the disaster, and said to the angel who was destroying, 'It is enough; now restrain your hand.' And the angel of the Lord stood by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. Then David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. So David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces. And David said to God, 'Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered? I am the one who has sinned and done evil indeed; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, O Lord my God, be against me and my father's house, but not against Your people that they should be plagued.'"

When David would not choose from the three options of punishment God decreed, for his sin, that Israel for suffer three days of plague, seemingly administered by a real angel who only became visible to David and the elders towards the end of the plague when Jerusalem was about to be struck. David was somewhat on the slow side in begging God to stop the plague. It appears as if God was the one who was hurt enough by the killing and David’s slowness to intervene for the people to say enough is enough. David then finally says strike me, not the people, since he was the one who had sinned.

In 2 Samuel 24:1 we read: "Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" Did God move David to sin? How can this verse be explained? We saw before in the parallel account that Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel yet it says in this account that God moved David. I quote Matthew Henry’s Unabridged Commentary to help explain this verse:

It is not strange that the anger of the Lord should be kindled against Israel. There was cause enough for it. They were unthankful for the blessings of David’s government, and strangely drawn in to take part with Absaloms first and afterwards with Sheba. We have reason to think that their peace and plenty made them secure and sensual,
and that God was therefore displeased with them. But that, in this displeasure, he should move David to number the people is very strange.

We are sure that God is not the author of sin; he tempts no man: we are told (1 Chronicles 21:1) that Satan provoked David to number Israel. Satan, as an enemy, suggested it for a sin, as he put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ. God, as righteous Judge, permitted it, with a design, from this sin of David, to take an occasion to punish Israel for other sins, for which he might justly have punished them without this.

But, as before he brought a famine upon them for the sin of Saul, so now a pestilence for the sin of David, that princes may from these instances learn, when the judgments of God are abroad, to suspect that their sins are the ground of the controversy, and may therefore repent and reform themselves, which should have a great influence upon national repentance and reformation, and that people may learn to pray for those in authority, that God would keep them from sin, because, if they sin, the kingdom smarts.

In 1 Kings 15:5 we read this summary of David's life: “David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.”

The leader of a church organization that I used to attend made a comment on a few occasions, based on this verse, that David's only major sin was the murder of Uriah the Hittite. I personally don't think that is what is meant by this verse when one takes into account the major sin he committed near the end of his life when he numbered Israel. Matthew Henry in his commentary feels that it was the only major sin in that it had lingering consequences for the nation given how it later affected his judgment with his children.

My personal view of what I feel is meant by the exception of the matter of Uriah the Hittite is that it was the only time in his life when he turned his back on his relationship with God for a long period of time. It was only after the child was born from the adultery that he confessed and repented of his sins which meant that he had turned his back on God for close to a full year.

The fact that the Bible calls David a man after his own heart despite his major sins says a lot about God's character. In a documentary that I saw on Lord Nelson, who defeated the French at Trafalgar, one of the commentators made a comment that great men make great mistakes. I found that comment encouraging from the point of view that even if you make great mistakes, of which I know I've made many, you can still go on to do great things for God.

A good example of this is in the faith chapter, Hebrews 11. It's encouraging that when God chose to remember them in this chapter He chose to remember them by their great deeds and not by their faults. Regardless of how spectacularly you may have failed today you always have a fresh start from tomorrow on to become a great success if you learn from your mistakes. In fact, those mistakes may help you to be an even better success.

King Solomon

After King David his son, Solomon, reigned over Israel. Before his death David compared his house to the tabernacle where the ark of God was kept and wanted to build a house or temple for God.

"Now it came to pass, when David was dwelling in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, 'See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under tent curtains.' Then Nathan said to David, 'Do all that is in your heart, for God is with you.' But it happened that night
that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, 'Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the L ORD: 'You shall not build Me a house to dwell in. For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought up Israel, even to this day, but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another. Wherever I have moved about with all Israel, have I ever spoken a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?' " (1 Chronicles 17:1-6).

It was never God’s intention to have a great Temple made for Himself. The way it’s worded here it almost seems as if God was happy to “rough it” as we might say today. Towards the end of David’s life God gave Israel permission to build a Temple for the ark but David was not to build it, his son Solomon would do so. God likes quality but is also happy to mix with the poor and humble. Solomon built the Temple of God and dedicated it in a great and wonderful ceremony which culminated in a great miracle by God.

In 1 Kings 8:10-12 we read: "And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the L ORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the L ORD filled the house of the L ORD. Then Solomon spoke: 'The L ORD said He would dwell in the dark cloud." The UCG Bible Reading Program makes these comments about the "glory of the Lord" which descended upon the newly dedicated Temple:

In a stupendous display, "the glory of the L ORD”—an awesome glowing cloud—“filled the house of the L ORD” (1 Kings 8:11). "As a cloud had covered the tabernacle and God’s glory had filled it when it was inaugurated (Exodus 40:34), so now a cloud filled the temple. This visible presence of God’s dwelling with His people—sometimes called the ‘shekinah [indwelling] glory’—gave the people assurance and incentive for obedient and holy living" (Nelson Study Bible, note on 1 Kings 8:10-11).

"And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished building the house of the L ORD and the king’s house, and all Solomon’s desire which he wanted to do, that the L ORD appeared to Solomon the second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon. And the L ORD said to him: 'I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'

"But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and will hiss, and say, 'Why has the L ORD done thus to this land and to this house?' Then they will answer, 'Because they forsook the L ORD their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore the L ORD has brought all this calamity on them'" (1 Kings 9:1-9).

God first appeared to Solomon and offered him anything he would ask for to which Solomon very maturely asked only for wisdom which God granted. His wisdom became legendary. God appeared to Solomon a second time and promised him that if he obeyed Him the royal line of Solomon would continue forever and if he and Israel turned from Him punishment would come on the nation. Even the newly dedicated Temple of God would be destroyed by foreigners used by God to punish His people.
For a time Solomon was faithful but in time he succumbed to a weakness that his father David also had. Beginning with a marriage to an Egyptian princess to seal an alliance with Egypt he developed a harem above and beyond the harems of any other king. Many of these were foreign women who subtly, gradually turned his heart away from God.

“But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.’ Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

“So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded. Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen’ (1 Kings 11:1-13).

Solomon and the nation paid a great price for his foolishness in bit by bit honouring and worshipping the gods of his many wives who he was willing to please. The nation was split into two straight after his death and the accession of his son Rehoboam.

There is strong indication that Solomon did turn back to God at the end of his life. He wrote the book of Ecclesiastes towards the end of his life which covers many of the bitter lessons that he learned during his life, including allowing women to turn him to sin (Ecclesiastes 7:26). However, by that time, the damage was already done.

The Kingdom of Israel Splits Into Two Kingdoms

The wealthy Solomon era came at a cost - heavy taxation on the people. They demanded the taxes be lightened by his son Rehoboam. Rehoboam got bad counsel and raised them higher resulting in a secession of ten tribes under the leadership of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12). The nation of Israel split into two nations, the northern Kingdom of Israel who’s capital was in Samaria and the southern Kingdom of Judah (from whom the Jews descend) who’s capital was in Jerusalem.

Had Jeroboam trusted God, who offered His support if he would obey Him, the Kingdom of Israel would have flourished. Instead, controlled by leadership insecurity, he barred the peoples of the new ten-tribed kingdom from going up to Jerusalem for the Feast days and created a feast like the Feast of Tabernacles in the eighth month in case they might be moved by emotion to want to reunite with the Kingdom of Judah.

“Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom may return to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.’ Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you
up from the land of Egypt! And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.

"Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense (1 Kings 12:25-33).

The books of Kings records that not one of the Kingdom of Israel’s kings ruled righteously but did evil instead and did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam which included this new form of idol worship – a syncretism of God’s religion with idol worship. Jeroboam had the incredible audacity to use calves as the state idols and said that these were the gods that had brought them up from Egypt when you consider the Israelites at Mt Sinai rebelled against God by worshiping a golden calf. As the northern Kingdom of Israel no longer had the correct form of religion they had little chance of having the true substance of God’s true religion. Not one of the Kingdom of Israel’s kings ruled righteously from that time on.

Judah, on the other hand, had fluctuations. Those fluctuations in power and prosperity were in direct proportion to the degree with which they obeyed or disobeyed God’s laws. Some kings did evil while other kings like Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Uzziah, Hezekiah and Josiah and were loyal to God for much or all of their reigns. A few of the good kings faltered towards the end of their reigns sadly which must have really disappointed and saddened God after their earlier faithfulness.

Asa and the nation of Judah were threatened by Zerah the Ethiopian with a million strong army. Asa threw himself at God’s mercy and asked him to deliver Judah which He did miraculously (2 Chronicles 14:9-12). Later though he relied on the king of Syria instead of God. When corrected by a prophet of God he was angry and threw the prophet into prison, oppressed some people and died of some kind of foot disease without seeking God’s intervention (2 Chronicles 16:7-12).

Uzziah was also a faithful king to begin with (2 Chronicles 26:1-7) but towards the end of his life his heart became proud and he presumptuously entered the Temple and burned incense to God. God then struck him with leprosy which he eventually died of without any indication of repentance mentioned in the scriptures.

In the books of Kings God always records whether the kings did anything about the high places and idols in the land. God felt like a betrayed husband watching his wife reaching for someone else when they turned to idols and false pagan gods.

The Ministry of Elijah

Close to a century after the split of the kingdom the prophet Elijah was used by God as a prophet to the people in the northern Kingdom of Israel during the time of Israel’s worst king – Ahab. The UCG Bible Reading Program says the following about the ministry of Elijah:

Elijah extends an invitation to a grand test to show who is the true God and who are His servants. Elijah told the people that it was time for them to stop sitting on the fence—faltering between two opinions by the syncretism of intermingling the worship of the true God with the worship of Baal. The same message applies today to the participants of modern Christendom, who, however unwittingly, mix elements of pagan worship—such as crosses, Christmas trees, Sunday observance, Easter eggs and Easter bunnies—with the worship of the God of the Bible.
The contest Elijah arranges was designed to apparently give every advantage to the Baal worshipers. Mount Carmel, near the modern city of Haifa on the Mediterranean coast, was considered sacred to Baal. The answering by fire apparently referred to lightning—and Baal was considered to be the god of storm, with lightning in his divine arsenal. Moreover, Elijah calls for his own sacrifice to the true God, and even the firewood it was to be burned upon, to be thoroughly and completely soaked with water—an ironic touch considering the kingdom had been plagued by a three-and-a-half-year drought that had started at Elijah’s command.

Moreover Elijah is just one against 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:22). It does not appear that the 400 prophets of Asherah answered the challenge (compare verse 19). Incidentally, we should consider Elijah’s statement that he alone is left a prophet of the Lord (verse 22). Why would he say this, since Obadiah had just reported his hiding of 100 of God’s prophets? (Verses 4, 13.) Perhaps they had been killed after Obadiah hid them, though it seems unlikely that this would have gone unmentioned in context. More likely Elijah was referring in verse 22 to himself being the only true prophet still carrying on a public ministry. The others had all gone underground.

The prophets of Baal probably begin calling on their gods by the time of the morning sacrifice. To evoke some sort of response from their god, they leap about and chant. By noon, the supposed height of the power of their sun god, there was still no answer—and Elijah begins his taunting. "Busy" in verse 27 is a euphemism. Notice the verse in the Contemporary English Version: “At noon, Elijah began making fun of them. ‘Pray louder!’ he said. ‘Baal must be a god. Maybe he’s daydreaming or using the toilet or traveling somewhere. Or maybe he’s asleep, and you have to wake him up.”

And rather than give up, they do cry out louder, leaping more earnestly—and they even “cut themselves, as was their custom” (verse 28). So, as bizarre as it may seem, such uncontrolled frenzy and self-mutilation were actually normal elements in their worship. This illustrates how pagan religion is often quite harmful to its participants. By contrast, the true religion God gave through Moses forbade such cuttings in the flesh (Leviticus 21:5; 19:28).

All of this continues until the time of the evening sacrifice, when Elijah finally takes his turn, beginning with the construction of God’s altar and the soaking of the sacrifice. In the end, God showed Himself to be the true God over storms, with real power to control the elements—indeed, the true God over all, while Baal was proven to be nothing.

With the storm to end the three-and-a-half-year drought approaching, Elijah, by the power of God, runs the 13 miles to Jezreel faster than Ahab’s horse-drawn chariot. In spite of the miraculous victory over Baal at Carmel, and the miracles that immediately followed, Jezebel’s threat on Elijah’s life is too much for him. Greatly distraught, he flees to the south, attempting to run away from the danger—his recently strengthened faith apparently evaporated. All of God’s people are subject to such moments. As the apostle James wrote, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17). Indeed, it is when we think we stand that we must take warning lest we fall (1 Corinthians 10:12). It should be noted that some mental depression that comes after a big crisis or challenge is usually partly physical in origin. The burst of physical and mental energy that comes with the high level of adrenaline released is often followed by a letdown when the adrenaline wears off.
In his rash flight, Elijah does not even stop in Judah, now ruled by righteous King Jehoshaphat. Instead, he flees far to the south, seeking refuge at Mount Sinai (Horeb), where God meets with him. God does not scold Elijah for his fear and self-pity. Instead, He comforts him. God lets Elijah know that he is not alone—that even if he is not aware of them, or has forgotten about them, there are others who have not followed Baal. And to further help combat the depression, God gives Elijah three tasks to perform. (Staying busy in a productive manner often helps in such situations.)

Regarding the still, small voice of God that He used to call out Elijah the Bible Believers Commentary makes the following comments:

There in a cave the LORD dealt with him. In a self-righteous spirit, Elijah protested his own faithfulness and denounced the children of Israel. He said in effect that he was the only one who had remained true to the Lord. God then commanded him to stand on the mountain of the law, but Elijah did not obey. We know this because later (v. 13) he went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. In rapid succession the mountains were visited by a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire.

These violent storms must have reminded Elijah of his harsh, censorious spirit. None of them brought him out of the cave. Finally, after the fire the prophet heard a still, small voice. It was this gracious voice of the Lord which brought him to the entrance of the cave. There he again exalted himself as God’s sole remaining witness. George Williams comments:

"Had his heart not been occupied with self, he would have learned that tempests, earthquakes and fires cannot accomplish what the gentle voice of love can. He should have recognized that there was no difference between his heart and that of the nation; and, that as coercion failed to make him leave his cave, so it failed, and must fail, to compel men to leave their sins."

The Lying Spirit

Soon after Elijah’s death, Jehoshaphat is ruling Judah at the same time as King Ahab in the northern Kingdom of Israel. When they form an alliance we read of a fascinating story regarding a lying spirit, who like Satan did in Job 1, fronts up to God’s throne and volunteers to do something for Him.

"Micaiah said, ‘Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left. ‘And the LORD said, ‘Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?’ So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, ‘I will persuade him.’ The LORD said to him, ‘In what way?’ So he said, ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And the LORD said, ‘You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.’ Therefore look! The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the LORD has declared disaster against you’ (1 Kings 22:19-23).

The UCG Bible Reading Program says the following about this story:

Jehoshaphat also forms an alliance with Ahab. As part of the alliance, their children, Jehoram and Athaliah, are married (2 Chronicles 18:1; 21:6). Jehoshaphat pays a visit to his ally, and Ahab proposes that Jehoshaphat join him in an attempt to recover Ramoth-Gilead from the Syrians in yet a third war with them. This was a
town on the east side of the Jordan that belonged to Gad and had originally been declared as a city of refuge (Deuteronomy 4:41-43).

Jehoshaphat agrees but insists on finding out God’s will in the matter first. For some reason, when asked about a prophet of God, Ahab does not mention Elijah or his assistant Elisha. Perhaps they were known to be away and not available. In any case, though many true prophets had been killed earlier in Ahab's reign, there were still a few around.

Here we are introduced to the prophet Micaiah, who is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture unless, as some have speculated, he is the same Micaiah sent out by Jehoshaphat to teach in Judah (2 Chronicles 17:7). One of the saddest aspects of this encounter is that Jehoshaphat, too, is persuaded to ignore the message from the prophet of God whom he had specifically asked to hear from.

Remarkably, we get a glimpse in our current reading of how God actually sometimes uses even demons to fulfill His purposes. Notice that God did not command any spirit here to lie. He simply asked who would do it and told the volunteer to go do what he was inclined to do anyway.

The fact that Micaiah's true prophecies were always at odds with those of Ahab’s prophets (compare 1 Kings 22:8) would seem to imply that a “lying spirit” was commonly behind the words of Ahab’s prophets.

Notice this from The Bible Reader's Companion: “Did God Himself lie to Ahab? Not at all. He did permit Ahab's prophets to lie.... [But] God in fact clearly revealed to Ahab the source of his prophets' predictions, and the truth about what would happen to him in the coming battle. Ahab's death resulted from refusing to believe the truth, not from a failure to know it. Let’s be careful not to blame God for the consequences of our own fully conscious choices” (note on 1 Kings 22).

God Divorces the House of Israel sending them into Captivity

The northern Kingdom of Israel were eventually conquered by Assyria around 722 BC and carried away to near the shores of the Caspian Sea and have never returned to Palestine, as a nation. They included the birthright tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh and eventually became known as the “Lost Tribes of Israel”.

"Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

"For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel secretly did against the LORD their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the LORD had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger, for they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, ‘You shall not do this thing.’ Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying,
'Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.'

"Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the L ORD their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the L ORD had charged them that they should not do like them. So they left all the commandments of the L ORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the L ORD, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the L ORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone" (2 Kings 5:18).

In Jeremiah 3 we read of how God felt betrayed by Israel who whored after and played the harlot with every nation and false god around them. The northern kingdom became so bad that God had to divorce them. Her sister, the southern kingdom of Judah, continued to follow Israel's adulterous example and would also later go into captivity after stirring up God's jealous anger greatly. Starting in verse 1 we read:

"They say, 'If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man's, may he return to her again?' Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me,' says the L ORD. 'Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: Where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness; and you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; You refuse to be ashamed. Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My father, you are the guide of my youth? Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end?' Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, As you were able.

"The L ORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: 'Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. And I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense,' says the L ORD.

"Then the L ORD said to me, 'Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the L ORD; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,' says the L ORD; 'I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the L ORD your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,' says the L ORD.

"'Return, O backsliding children,' says the L ORD; 'for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days,' says the L ORD, 'that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the L ORD.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore. At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the L ORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the L ORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the
dictates of their evil hearts. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers. But I said: 'How can I put you among the children and give you a pleasant land, a beautiful heritage of the hosts of nations?' And I said: 'You shall call Me, 'My Father,' And not turn away from Me. Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,' says the LORD.

"A voice was heard on the desolate heights, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel. For they have perverted their way; they have forgotten the LORD their God. 'Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.' 'Indeed we do come to You, for You are the LORD our God. Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; truly, in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. For shame has devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth—their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.' 'If you will return, O Israel,' says the LORD, 'Return to Me; and if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, then you shall not be moved. And you shall swear, 'The LORD lives,' In truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory'" (Jeremiah 3:1-4:2).

**Hezekiah**

At the time that the northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians Hezekiah was the king of Judah. Hezekiah was a faithful king to God’s ways and restored the Temple worship ([2 Chronicles 29](https://www.ucg.org/bible-study/bible-reading-program/chapter-29)) that was stopped by his father. The UCG Bible Reading Program makes the following comments:

Then came the actual observance of the Passover. While Hezekiah and the priests were very careful to do all that was required in the law of God ([2 Chronicles 30:16](https://www.ucg.org/bible-study/bible-reading-program/chapter-30)), some in the assembly, particularly those who did come down from the northern tribes, were not appropriately prepared for it. While the Passover was normally slain by the heads of household, and the priests only sprinkled the blood on the altar, in this case the Levites killed the Passover for those who were not clean (verse 17).

Even then, eating the Passover was technically not permitted ([compare Numbers 9:6-7](https://www.ucg.org/bible-study/bible-reading-program/chapter-9)), but because of the special circumstances, and the fact that this was already the second Passover, Hezekiah prayed that God would look on the hearts of the people and forgive this transgression. And God did, "healing" the people—that is, their relationship with Him ([2 Chronicles 30:18-20](https://www.ucg.org/bible-study/bible-reading-program/chapter-30)). The people also went on to keep the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month—and, moved by the religious fervor and revival, went on to keep *yet another* seven days of feasting and rejoicing.

God would have felt great joy in seeing them keeping the Passover again and temple worship being restored. Following this great event the Assyrian king Sennacherib came up against Judah. The UCG Bible Reading Program makes the following comments:

The field commander then claims that God had told the Assyrians to destroy the land ([2 Kings 18:25](https://www.ucg.org/bible-study/bible-reading-program/chapter-18)). God probably did not speak to the king of Assyria, although He apparently did move the Assyrians to war against the northern kingdom of Israel and take its people captive—and now He was similarly moving Assyria against Judah. Yet in his particular claim the Assyrian official was, no doubt, being rather presumptuous. But he really gets into trouble when he challenges God Himself, saying that God is no different than the gods of the other nations he has destroyed,
and is incapable of delivering Jerusalem (verses 30-35). As we will see in the rest of the account, God is not like the false gods of pagan nations.

Hezekiah takes the field commander’s blasphemy to God. Through Isaiah, God assures him He has heard it and will deal with the Assyrians...But far greater forces were pitted against Assyria. Hezekiah went back to the temple, this time taking Sennacherib’s blasphemous letter and laying it out before God (verse 14). Once again, Isaiah is used to confirm God’s anger at the Assyrians’ blasphemy and presumptuousness...

God miraculously intervened and slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (verse 35). Sennacherib returned in disgrace to Nineveh, where he of course did not report his ignominious defeat. Rather, he did what he could to make it look like a victory. T.C. Mitchell of the British Museum writes, “The Assyrian annals tacitly agree with the Biblical version by making no claim that Jerusalem was taken, only describing tribute from Hezekiah of gold, silver, precious stones, valuable woods, furniture decorated with ivory...iron daggers, raw iron and musicians” (The Bible in the British Museum, 2000, p.59).

"In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.’ Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying, ‘Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.’ Then Isaiah said, ‘Take a lump of figs.’ So they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.

“And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, ‘What is the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD the third day?’ Then Isaiah said, ‘This is the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing which He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?’ And Hezekiah answered, ’It is an easy thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward ten degrees.’ So Isaiah the prophet cried out to the LORD, and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz” (2 Kings 20:1-11).

We see here that God is quite moved by Hezekiah’s prayer and tears. Even though God had told him that he would die Hezekiah’s depth of feeling and emotion moved God to change His mind in the same kind of way Moses was able to change God’s mind about destroying Israel. We do have a God who can be moved to change His mind based on how we prayerfully appeal to Him. Following God’s decision to extend his life by 15 years God chooses to give a miraculous sign to affirm His promise to Hezekiah by moving the Sun back 10 degrees in the sky. The UCG Bible Reading Program makes these comments:

All healing comes from God—and our working within His laws of health and healing does not betray trust in Him. Even using physical methods such as Isaiah prescribed, it is still the laws of God that do the healing. Thus, God’s promise to heal can include using the systems of the body and is not limited to overt miracles. In Hezekiah’s case, perhaps God supernaturally healed part of Hezekiah’s problem and let natural healing methods alleviate the other part.
We then see the sign of the sundial. This was an incredible miracle. Like the miracle of Joshua's long day, it involved stopping the earth from turning—and this time rolling it backwards a ways. Consider that the surface of the earth at the equator is moving at a speed of more than 1,000 miles per hour. The laws of inertia demand that if the earth were suddenly stopped, everything on its surface would go flying forward—and massive upheaval would result on land and sea. So God had to have kept everything calm and in place. It is truly staggering to contemplate. Certainly Hezekiah understood it to be a great miracle. But given our scientific knowledge today, we are able to realize the immense complexity of this miracle far more than Hezekiah possibly could have.

"At that time Berodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah was attentive to them, and showed them all the house of his treasures—the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory—all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.

"Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, 'What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?' So Hezekiah said, 'They came from a far country, from Babylon.' And he said, 'What have they seen in your house?' So Hezekiah answered, 'They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.' Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the LORD: 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. 'And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.' So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good!' For he said, 'Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?'" (2 Kings 20:12-19).

"Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah...However, regarding the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chronicles 32:26, 31).

God tested Hezekiah. Unfortunately, Hezekiah proudly and without proper discretion, showed off the wealth of the national treasuries to the Babylonians, treasures that would eventually end up in Babylon. Hezekiah just accepted the word of God this time and sadly didn't make a real effort to persuade God to change His mind.

**Manasseh and God's Deep Forgiveness**

In 2 Chronicles 33 we read the story of Hezekiah's son Manasseh who did not obey God like his father. In fact, he did much worse than any other king of Judah. God brought him right down and had him dragged off to Babylon by the king of Assyria. In prison Manasseh repented of some of the worst evils done by a Jewish king and was forgiven and restored by God highlighting just how incredible and deep God's forgiveness is.

"Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. But he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, 'In Jerusalem shall My name be forever.' And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son
of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, 'In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses.' So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.

"And the LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen. Therefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon. Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God. After this he built a wall outside the City of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate; and it enclosed Ophel, and he raised it to a very great height. Then he put military captains in all the fortified cities of Judah. He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem; and he cast them out of the city. He also repaired the altar of the LORD, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD their God (2 Chronicles 33:1-17).

The UCG Bible Reading Program makes the following comments about Manasseh:

Manasseh had wielded a lot of power in Judah and, though his father had been a righteous king, the people of Judah were easily led astray. Even after Manasseh repented and tried to restore right religion in Judah, the people remained essentially evil and were ultimately to suffer the same fate as Manasseh. "Manasseh's personal though belated repentance reminds us that it is never too late for the individual to return to the Lord. Yet the O[ld] T[estament] makes it clear that Manasseh's years mark the point of no return for Judah. 2 Kings 23:26 says, 'The Lord did not turn from the heat of His fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke Him to anger' ([NIV] cf. Jeremiah 15:4)" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on 2 Chronicles 33:1-20).

Josiah

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images...In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God...Now when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD given by Moses...

"Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, 'Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.' And Shaphan read it before the king. Thus it happened, when the king heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes. Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, 'Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for those who are left in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great is the
wrath of the LORD that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book’...

"Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah, because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place, and not be quenched. But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, in this manner you shall speak to him, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Concerning the words which you have heard—because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you’" says the LORD. 'Surely I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place and its inhabitants’” (2 Chronicles 34:1-28).

Josiah was a remarkable king. At the tender age of eight he began to reign. At age twelve he did all that could to rid the land of its idols and high places and at age eighteen he began to repair the Temple.

God was very moved by his zeal at such a young age and his humility when he realized how much his nation had angered God by their sins. God knew that Judah as a nation would not turn from its sinful course and would eventually have to be punished by going into captivity but God promised that Josiah would live out his life peacefully because he had a tender heart – a heart that can be touched and moved to do what is right when corrected.

Judah taken into Captivity

The southern Kingdom of Judah was eventually conquered and taken into exile by the Babylonians around 585 BC. A remnant of the Jews would return to Palestine 70 years later amongst whose descendants Jesus Christ was born 500 years later.

"And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

"Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years” (2 Chronicles 36:15-21).

In the final years of the Kingdom of Judah there was a long struggle between the Pharaoh of Egypt identified in the Bible as Necho (who was also known to us in history as Ramses the Great) and King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The control of the lands of Syria and Palestine went back and forth between these two great kings over a 20 year period.

The Pharaoh was on his way to aid the King of Assyria, who he was allied to, when Josiah tried to prevent his passing at Megiddo against God’s will. Josiah was killed by an arrow in the battle (2 Chronicles 35:20-24). Soon after Judah became a vassal state under Egyptian rule. Josiah's son,
Jehoahaz, reigned for 3 months and then rebelled against Egypt. His rebellion was put down and he was replaced by Pharaoh as king by Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:31-37).

Soon after the balance of power shifted to the Babylonians. This occurred after the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians in the famous battle of Carchemish (Jeremiah 46:2 – This battle was one and the same battle as the Battle of Kadesh fought by Ramses the Great). After being a vassal state of Egypt for 8 years Judah then became a vassal state to the Babylonians paying them an annual tribute (2 Kings 23:36-24:1). Egypt would no more challenge the Babylonians and would be no help to the Jews (2 Kings 24:7).

Jeremiah warned the Jews not to trust in the Pharaoh of Egypt (Jeremiah 2:36-37) yet Jehoiakim rebelled after 3 years by refusing to pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar sent an army of Chaldeans and Syrians against Jerusalem. Jehoiakim was captured and executed and Nebuchadnezzar placed the young Jeconiah (Jehoiachin), son of Jehoiakim, on the throne of his father in Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:2-9).

Jeconiah reigned only three months. Nebuchadnezzar, suspicious and uncertain whether the new king of Jerusalem would keep faith with Babylon, once more marched against Jerusalem and besieged it (2 Kings 24:11-16). The boy king, in his desire to save the city and its people, went out to Nebuchadnezzar to establish his loyalty. He was sent to Babylon together with "all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths." Only the poor were left. Jeconiah remained in prison in Babylon for thirty-seven years, until the death of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:27).

When Jeconiah was taken to Babylon, Zedekiah, the third son of Josiah, was appointed to be king. The removal of the wealthy, the influential, and the skilled from Jerusalem did not insure against a new rebellion. Despite all that had happened before, the freedom-loving people of Jerusalem desired a war of independence, in which they expected help from the pharaoh. Eight years after Zedekiah was appointed king he revoluted. Nebuchadnezzar came with all his forces against Jerusalem and besieged it. After eighteen months the Chaldeans captured and burned the city and carried the people of Jerusalem away into Babylonian captivity (2 Kings 25).

The options that God gave the people of Judah in their last days changed the further they descended into immorality.

At first, they could repent and do justice and they could dwell safely in their own land with their own autonomy. Unfortunately they got worse and worse. There was corruption in leadership, crime and violence that spun out of control, innocent blood being spilled and people went safe in their own land.

Once the immorality sunk to another level that option was no longer available. God told them to surrender and serve the Babylonians (Jeremiah 27). The Jewish government was so inept at providing safety and security for its people that foreign control was better than their own government.

As they sunk to an even deeper level of immorality God told to go into captivity or die. In Jeremiah 29 God told them through Jeremiah to not try and rebel against their captivity but to accept it until the 70 years were up that God had decreed for their captivity.

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace” (Jeremiah 29:4-7).
Captivity would be God's way of solving Israel's problems. It was the lesser of two evils. They would not be safe in their own land. He said that He wanted them to be increased there in captivity not diminished. There was peace and order in Babylon compared to how bad things had become in Judah. God took the people that he wanted and sent them to Babylon and left the dregs in the land to die. After 70 years of the land lying fallow then He would bring the good ones back.

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive” (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

Even when they least deserved it God had thoughts of peace and not evil toward them, to give them a future and a hope. How much more kindly must God feel to us when we do try our best to live by His way of life? He said that they would eventually find him in captivity. Many of them found God in their captivity. Some things did get cleaned out as a result of the captivity. One was getting rid of idols. Idol worship no longer was a major problem in Judah after the captivity like it was before.

**Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar**

In his book “Mystery of the Ages” Herbert Armstrong writes the following:

> Among the Jewish captives taken to Babylon was a brilliant young man, Daniel, a prophet who wrote the book under his name in the Bible. God used the prophet Daniel as a go-between between the Eternal and King Nebuchadnezzar.

> This great gentile king had organized one of the world's first empire[s] uniting several nations under one government. God used Daniel to make known to the Babylonian king that the Creator God ruled over the whole earth, and that Nebuchadnezzar held his throne only by God's will. Actually, God was giving this gentile king opportunity to come under God's rule and have the consequent blessings of God (p.150).

God made an opportunity available to Nebuchadnezzar to come under God's rule and have the consequent blessings of God which he only partially accepted but not until after seven years of insanity when he ate grass with the beasts.

Daniel made it plain to Nebuchadnezzar that those who rule do so because God allows it. In Daniel 2:20-21, we read, “Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changes the times and the seasons: he removes kings, and sets up kings”.

God macro-manages the affairs of the world. For the most part He keeps His hands off this world but allows and sometimes work things out so certain good or bad rulers get into power to teach various nations lessons and to fulfil certain prophecies instrumental in His master plan for mankind.

Sometimes God allows bad leaders to get in to punish nations eg, sending the vicious Assyrians in to take the House of Israel captive. Sometimes He works things out so certain good leaders get into power to further the fulfilment of prophecies eg. Leaders such as Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt were instrumental in keeping the free world from falling under the control of Nazi Germany under Hitler and their allies. Had America fallen into Nazi hands the work of God under Herbert Armstrong may never have been able to grow as it did.
The following is a truly remarkable account of how God protected George Washington during the French and Indian War before his destiny in helping the United States win the War of Independence and becoming its first president:

The account of George Washington at the Battle at the Monongahela was included in student textbooks in America until 1934. During the French and Indian War, George Washington fought alongside British General Edward Braddock. On July 9, 1755, the British were on the way to Fort Duquesne, when the French surprised them in an ambush attack. The British, who were not accustomed to fighting unless in an open field, were being annihilated. Washington rode back and forth across the battle delivering General Braddock's orders. As the battle raged, every other officer on horseback, except Washington, was shot down.

General Braddock was mortally wounded, at which point the troops fled in confusion. On Sunday night, July 13, 1754, General Braddock died and Washington, under cover of night, read the funeral service over him by the light of a torch.

After the battle, on July 18, 1755, Washington wrote from Fort Cumberland to his brother, John A. Washington:

"As I have heard, since my arrival at this place, a circumstantial account of my death and dying speech, I take this early opportunity of contradicting the first, and of assuring you, that I have not as yet composed the latter. But by the All-Powerful Dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation; for I had four bullets through my coat, and two horses shot under me, yet escaped unhurt, although death was levelling my companions on every side of me!"

Fifteen years later, Washington and Dr. Craik, a close friend of his from his youth, were traveling through those same woods near the Ohio river and Great Kanawha river. They were met by an old Indian chief, who addressed Washington through an interpreter:

"I am a chief and ruler over my tribes. My influence extends to the waters of the great lakes and to the far blue mountains. I have traveled a long and weary path that I might see the young warrior of the great battle. It was on the day when the white man's blood mixed with the streams of our forests that I first beheld this Chief. I called to my young men and said, mark yon tall and daring warrior? He is not of the red-coat tribe - he hath an Indian's wisdom, and his warriors fight as we do - himself alone exposed. Quick, let your aim be certain, and he dies. Our rifles were leveled, rifles which, but for you, knew not how to miss - 'twas all in vain, a power mightier far than we, shielded you.

"Seeing you were under the special guardianship of the Great Spirit, we immediately ceased to fire at you. I am old and soon shall be gathered to the great council fire of my fathers in the land of shades, but ere I go, there is something bids me speak in the voice of prophecy: Listen! The Great Spirit protects that man [indicating Washington], and guides his destinies - he will become the chief of nations, and a people yet unborn will hail him as the founder of a mighty empire. I am come to pay homage to the man who is the particular favorite of Heaven, and who can never die in battle."

An Indian warrior who was in that battle declared: "Washington was never born to be killed by a bullet! I had seventeen fair fires at him with my rifle, and after all could not bring him to the ground!"
On July 8, 1755, Mary Draper Ingels had been kidnapped from her home in Draper Meadows, Virginia by a band of Shawnee Indians. In her biography she recorded her escape in mid-winter and her nearly one thousand mile trek back home. At one point during her captivity, she overheard a meeting that the Shawnee had with some Frenchmen. They described in detail the British defeat in the battle of Monongahela at Duquesne, and how the Indian Chief Red Hawk claimed to have shot Washington eleven times, but did not succeed in killing him (“American Quotations”. William J. Federer).

There were a number of miracles which took place during World War II in which the Israelites were assisted by God in the war to free the world from Nazi domination. Raymond McNair in the booklet "America and Britain in Prophecy” documents a number of these great miracles:

Remember how God sent Joseph to Egypt before the rest of his family "to preserve life... and to save [their] lives by a great deliverance" (Gen. 45:5,7)? The descendants of Joseph were used in a similar way in the 20th century. When the other Israelite nations of Northwest Europe were oppressed by the Nazi jackboot, it was primarily America and Britain--the sons of modern "Joseph"--who freed them. Of course, no one was as sorely afflicted during World War II as the Jews, the children of Judah, who were enduring Hitler’s "Final Solution"--the awful, genocidal Holocaust. After a hard, bitter struggle, Joseph's descendants at long last broke through the German lines and came to the rescue of their brother Judah and the other Northwest European nations of Israel. And, even amid the horror of what had happened, there was great weeping and rejoicing at this wonderful deliverance in 1945. At no time has it been more true that "the arms of [Joseph’s] hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob" (Gen. 49:24) than during the Second World War. Were it not for the many instances of divine intervention in that conflict, the Axis Powers could have emerged victorious, plunging the entire world into a new "Dark Age."

In the "Miracle of Dunkirk" (May 26-June 4, 1940) the trapped Allies could easily have been destroyed by Hitler's army as they attempted to evacuate across the English Channel. But, inexplicably, unusual weather closed in. An extremely thick fog blanketed the area and the usually rough water of the Channel became so calm that even the smallest boats could sail on it without risk of capsizing. The fog grounded the Nazi airplanes which couldn't effectively see their targets to bomb them--and Hitler gave a strange order for his tanks to halt their advance. So a motley flotilla of about 1,000 boats of every size and description evacuated over 338,000 Allied troops from the beaches at Dunkirk. Hitler's strange order and the God-sent weather saved the day. Many among the Allies considered their escape from Dunkirk an instance of divine intervention! As Churchill later said, "Wars are not won by evacuations, but there was a victory inside this DELIVERANCE."

The Battle of Britain (June 20-Oct. 31 1940), which soon followed, was decisive in saving Britain from Nazi invasion! Though severely pounded by German bombing, Britain rallied behind Churchill, and the British Royal Air Force eventually won the day against the German Luftwaffe. Britain's Chief Air Marshal, Sir Hugh Dowding, Commander-in-Chief of Fighter Command, gave God the credit: "I say with absolute conviction that I can trace the INTERVENTION OF GOD, not only in the battle itself, but in the events which led up to it, and that if it had not been for this intervention, the battle would have been joined in conditions which, humanly speaking, would have rendered victory impossible!"
In the first battle of El Alamein in July 1942, more than 1,000 Germans surrendered to the Allies due to extreme thirst caused by drinking salt water out of a British-laid pipeline—which, remarkably, would have been empty the day before—or full of fresh water two days later. According to British Major Peter Rainier, "For 1,100 of them [the Germans] to surrender when escape lay open—that was nothing short of a MIRACLE!" ("A Drink That Made History," Reader’s Digest). On October 31, 1942, during the final battle of El Alamein, a somber Churchill gave God full credit: "I have a feeling sometimes that some GUIDING HAND has interfered. I have a feeling that we [Britons] have a GUARDIAN."

On D-Day (June 6, 1944), the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy. Years later, the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces, American General Dwight D. Eisenhower, revealed what an agonizing decision he had been called upon to make when giving the green light to the invasion. He also said, "If there were nothing else in my life to prove the existence of an Almighty and Merciful God, the events of the next twenty-four hours did it!" D-Day was a great success!

Later that same year, American forces in the Pacific fought the powerful Japanese fleet in what became the world's greatest sea battle—the Battle of Leyte Gulf—on October 23-25. "Sprague [the U.S. force's operational commander] was dumbfounded... He had held his own against a fleet many times his superior... His success was due, he wrote later, not simply to the tactics he had adopted but also to 'the definite partiality of ALMIGHTY GOD'" (The World at War, p. 375). But it would take far more than this victory to defeat the Japanese—who were resolved to hold out to the last man if need be.

The Anglo-Americans—with the help of Jewish scientists fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe—won the frenzied race to build the atomic bomb. And, to avert the possible deaths of millions in a conventional invasion of Japan, President Truman ordered the new super weapon to be used. Churchill said, "We [Anglo-Americans] seemed suddenly to have become possessed of a merciful abridgment of the slaughter in the East and of a far happier prospect in Europe. I have no doubt that these thoughts were present in the minds of my American friends. At any rate, there never was a moment’s discussion as to whether the atomic bomb should be used or not! To avert a vast, indefinite butchery, to bring the war to an end, to give peace to the world, to lay healing hands upon its tortured peoples by a manifestation of overwhelming power at the cost of a few explosions, seemed, after all our toils and perils, A MIRACLE OF DELIVERANCE" (p. 553)!

In Acts 17:26 we read: “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.” God guides the nations and races to their inheritance. God has also appointed their times to migrate to their lands and times to come to dominate in this world at a sub-conscious level. Most peoples and races have had periods of time when they dominated and had great empires from Assyria, Babylon and Rome to the Mongolian, Spanish and British empires.

Coming back now to the book of Daniel, the faith and courage shown by Daniel and his companions (Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego) would have given God great joy and encouragement. Daniel’s companions were prepared to die a fiery death than to dishonour God by bowing to an idol all were commanded by Nebuchadnezzar to worship (Daniel 3). Daniel faithfully obeyed God’s laws and continued to have a close relationship with God, praying three times a day for His people, even with all the responsibilities that he had with high position in the kingdom that he had. His enemies could not find fault with him and had to make prayer to the true God a crime in order to convict him yet God delivered him out of the mouths of the lions when imprisoned for this so-called “crime” (Daniel 6).
A rather interesting passage of scripture is found in Daniel 10:12-14 where we read: "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia."

Daniel has just been given a lot of prophecies which he wanted to know the meaning of. He prayed and fasted to God asking Him for understanding. Now God could have whispered in Daniel’s ear or the angel could simply have materialised in Daniel’s room.

Gabriel had spoken to Daniel twice before this event. The angel here in this chapter is not specifically identified as Gabriel. Why did God allow this angel to battle these demons for three weeks before he got his message through? Was it to test this angel? It is possible that some of the angels were created at a later time than those original angels who were there at the beginning of the creation of the earth (Job 38:4-7) and, as a result, their character may not be set yet. Another point that we pick up with this story is that many of the demons are territorial, controlling people in particular places of the world.

What this story reveals to us, almost as an aside, is that there is a spiritual world alongside our world, invisible to us, but real, vibrant, alive and dangerous. We get another glimpse of this unseen spirit world in 2 Kings 6:15-17 where we read: "And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' So he answered, 'Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

The Return of the Jews

In 539 BC the Babylonian empire was conquered by the Persians led by Cyrus, whom God had specifically prophesied by name would conquer Babylon through the prophet Isaiah some 200 years before it happened.

The Jewish leaders, knowing this prophecy, showed it to Cyrus at a favourable opportunity and Cyrus was very impressed with the uncanny accuracy of the prophecy. Cyrus was determined to fulfill the rest of his divine destiny as prophesied in Isaiah 44:28. Josephus states:

When Cyrus read this and admired the divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written; so he called for the most eminent Jews that were in Babylon and said to them, that he gave them leave to go back to their own country and to rebuild their city Jerusalem.

The Biblical record of this event is recorded for us in Ezra 1:1-3 where we read:

"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem."
Notice that God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus. In "Mystery of the Ages" Herbert Armstrong makes the following comments about this:

In Ephesians 2:2, Satan is called the prince of the power of the air, working in -- inside the minds of -- people. I could never have understood this until: 1) I had understood how radio and television sounds and pictures are transmitted through the air; and 2) I had learned the truth about the human spirit in the human brain. If your radio is set on the proper radio wavelength, or television set is tuned to the proper channel, the broadcaster's message comes through clearly. Satan as prince of the power of the air broadcasts -- not in words, sounds or pictures, but in attitudes, moods, impulses.

For example, we read in Ezra 1:1, when King Cyrus of Persia issued a proclamation to send a colony of Jews back to Jerusalem to build the second Temple, he was moved to do so because God stirred up his human spirit -- in other words, put the suggestion and impulse in his mind, and the king acted on it. In the same manner Satan moves on the human spirit within people to move them in attitudes of envy, jealousy, resentment, impatience, anger, bitterness and strife (p.119).

In Ezra 7:27 we read: "Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." God had put it into the hearts of the Persian kings of this time to provide generously for the rebuilding of the Temple. They experienced much opposition from the peoples who had moved into the land during their captivity but God helped them to complete the job.

The Temple was eventually completed in 516 BC. Many were disheartened when they looked back on how much better and magnificent the former Temple looked in comparison compared to the basic looking Temple that they had worked on (Haggai 2:3). Through the prophet Zechariah God said to them:

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know that the L ORD of hosts has sent Me to you. For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the L ORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:9-10).

God can take small things and make them great through His power and spirit (Zechariah 4:6). God was delighted and excited about this historic occasion when the Jews finally returned to the Holy Land and rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple.

In the interim period between when the Temple was built and the remainder of the Jews returned to Palestine a crisis for the Jews arose in the days of the Persian king Ahasuerus (Xerxes I - 486-466 BC). Because of a dishonourable act on the part of Queen Vashti the Persian king essentially had a beauty contest to chose a new wife. A Jewish young lady by the name of Esther was chosen as his new queen. One of the king's top officials hatched a plot to kill all the Jews. Esther would have to go against court protocol to tell the king and persuade him to rescind the edict to annihilate the Jews.

In Esther 4:13-14 we read: "And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: 'Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
God’s purpose of saving the Jews would stand but how it would be fulfilled was determined by the choices of those God would work with to achieve His purpose. If Esther failed to speak up God would see to it that the Jews would be saved another way. The UCG Bible Reading Program makes these comments about how God works:

God often works in human events in this manner, interweaving His plans with those of men, bringing His will to pass by using the circumstances and individuals at hand. Thus, God works within the flow of history to accomplish certain ends without violating man’s free will and often without producing an obvious trail of “miraculous” happenings.

Nehemiah helped complete the walls of Jerusalem and rebuild the city around 445 BC. There was much celebration after the work was completed after much opposition from the peoples who had moved into the land during their captivity.

“Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, ‘This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep.’ For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, ‘Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.’ So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, ‘Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.’ And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

“Now on the second day the heads of the fathers’ houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law. And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written.’ Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the LORD of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner” (Nehemiah 8:9-18).

There was tremendous joy at the occasion of this Feast of Tabernacles which had not been kept with such joy for a long time. God., no doubt, rejoiced with them at this historic juncture of time. There were problems though around this period of time. The Gentile peoples who moved into the land around them were a thorn in their side and led many to defile the Sabbath and take pagan wives which infuriated Nehemiah who was zealous for God and which Nehemiah straightened out as best as he could around 435 BC (Nehemiah 13).

The same problems which had brought God’s anger upon the Jews prior to their captivity crept in yet again. The final Old Testament, Malachi, who began his ministry around 430 BC confronted them with their neglect of the Temple and their false and profane worship with most of God’s anger directed at the terrible example that was being set by the priests. We’ll look at what Malachi had to say to them a little later. The Jews would later go from side of the ditch to the other, going from complete neglect of the Sabbath to an overly legalistic approach with a whole set of extra man-made do’s and don’t’s added to the
Judaic system of religion that developed as a knee-jerk reaction to their disobedience that led to the captivity. It was this system that burdened people and often broke the spirit and intent of the laws of God that Jesus rebuked sharply when He would be born and live amongst these Jews several centuries later.

**Job**

The book of Job follows Esther in the Bible according the main order of books that we are used to. When Job lived and where Uz was has been the subject of some debate. In the church it was formerly believed that he lived prior to the Flood and was the architect of the Great Pyramid. Job 1:15-17 mentions the Chaldeans (who settled in southern Turkey) and the Sabeans (who settled in the Arabian peninsula) who only came into existence as peoples after the Flood. Uz is probably north-east of Palestine. Job probably lived prior to the Exodus and may perhaps be the Job listed in Genesis 46:13 as a son of Issachar.

The story of Job is quite an astounding story. It begins with a peek into the goings on at God’s heavenly throne and we might be surprised to find that God allows Satan to just waltz up to His throne and have an audience with Him.

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, 'From where do you come?' So Satan answered the LORD and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.' Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'” (Job 1:6-8).

God here is like a proud father holding Job up as a great example. Notice that God is the one who draws Satan’s attention to Job. God’s actions in allowing Satan to hurt Job and inflict him with boils all over his body shows that God is willing to let flesh be torn in order to strengthen the spirit but first Satan is allowed to destroy all his children and his property as a test to see if Job only worships God when God blesses him physically.

"Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: 'Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.' In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong” (Job 1:20-22).

God calls Job a blameless and upright man so this trial appears to come upon him not because of sin but for a different purpose. This story also shows that Satan can only do as much as God will allow Him to. His power is restricted by God. Job’s reaction is amazing. Few of us would have such a fine attitude if we went through the same circumstances.

"Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause. So Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!' And the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.'"

"So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he..."
sat in the midst of the ashes. Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!' But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:3-10).

Again Job's reaction is astonishing as he shows a willingness to accept adversity from God. The trial that he went through was so great that Job's friends were overwhelmed with grief and just sat with him without saying a word for a week.

The silence from God about why He had to suffer was particularly difficult for Job to bear. God will often appear to make no sense and is not obliged to tell us why He lets us go trials. We may not find out for years or even decades but God is always working out what is best for us and our character.

Job's friends maintained he must have done something wrong to have deserved this adversity from God. Job maintained his innocence. He was right that he had not done anything wrong to deserve punishment but seriously questioned that there was anything to gain from the trial and felt God was unjust bringing it upon him. This is what he would later have to repent of, which he does in the last chapter.

So what was this trial all about? In Hebrews 2:10 Jesus is described as the “captain of [our] salvation [made] perfect [or complete] through sufferings.” Jesus became complete through sufferings. While He was spiritually perfect He had not been through these kind of sufferings which added to His experience which allows Him to better understand our pain through experience of the same thing. Job's situation was much the same. After the trials that he went through he could then better feel for and empathize with others who’d gone through the same kind of pain and trials.

In James 5:10-11 we read: “My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” The end intended by God was that Job would be more patient and compassionate with those who were poor and who had gone through periods of great pain both after his trial and in the World Tomorrow. His spiritual growth had plateaued but God took him to a whole new level.

After a long period of silence God finally challenges Job who has accused him of being unjust for putting him through this trial. Throughout chapters 38 to 41 God takes him through all the wonders of creation and asks whether he thinks he is greater and wiser than God.

"Then Job answered the LORD and said: 'I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.' I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:1-6).

Job repents of doubting God's wisdom in the way that He dealt with his situation. In God's mercy and generosity God not only restores all that he lost but doubles it.

God's Feelings and Personality in the Psalms and Proverbs

Let’s now look at what we can learn about God’s feelings and personality in the Psalms and Proverbs.

David writes in Psalm 8:3-6: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that
You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet."

In all the great vast universe we are like little ants yet God takes a personal interest in us. All this universe around us was created for us. Without beings to enjoy what this physical universe has to offer it has little point.

In Psalm 33:18 we read: "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy." God's eyes are on those who fear Him. He takes a personal interest in us even to the smallest details of our life.

In Psalm 34:8 we read: "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him." God says to us "Try me out, live my way of life, get to know me by obeying me and I know that you will really enjoy it and have a much happier life.

In Psalm 34:18 we read that “The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.” God is near to those of a broken heart. He sees our pain and wants to be there for us and help us out, especially when we realize our carnal way doesn’t work and we want to really change and do things His way.

In Psalm 37:4 we read: “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” God wants us to love obeying Him and not just obey because we have to. If we cheerfully and delightfully obey Him God will be generous to us and give us the desires of our heart when He feels it is spiritually good for us to do so.

In Psalm 37:26-28 we read: “He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell forevermore. For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever.” We read here more about his mercy and his love of justice and his faithful in looking after those He has called into the church.

In Psalm 50 God tells us that He’s not mainly interested in religious ceremony but is interested in us living according to His law and loving our fellow neighbour. God keeps silent at times and does nothing but that doesn’t mean He approves of our ways when we sin. He hates religious hypocrisy and wants us to order our conduct aright.

"Hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; I am God, your God! I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are continually before Me. I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

"But to the wicked God says: 'What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil, And your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes. Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God" (verses 7-23).
When David composed Psalm 51 where he confesses his terrible sins of murder and adultery to God he says in verse 12: “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.” He speaks here of God’s generous spirit – God is generous and merciful and is eager to help us know joy again and delight in our salvation and relationship with Him when we truly repent of our sins.

How must have God felt when David finally confessed His sins and turned back to Him after a full year of refusing to confess His sins? God must have felt very relieved to have finally gotten through to Him. There was much anger and punishment He meted out to Him in his rebuke, through David’s nephew Nathan, but gradually the joy would have returned in His relationship with David.

In Psalm 55 David wrote: “Destruction is in its midst. Oppression and deceit do not depart from its streets. For it is not an enemy who reproaches me then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng” (verses 11-14).

David speaks here of the betrayal of a friend in the faith who then left the faith and turned against Him. Many of us in the church have no doubt hurt a lot seeing good church friends leave the church and sometimes become quite cynical of the church. God knows how that feels. It happened to Him with Lucifer, who was not just any ordinary angel but one of the two top cherubs who served at God’s very throne. How must God have felt as He watched Satan gradually well up with pride and vanity and rebel against Him? It would have been a painful time slowly watching Lucifer’s attitude get more and more poisoned and watching him spread lies about Him to the other angels under His control and then watching them side with Lucifer.

In Psalm 62:8 we read: “Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.” God wants us to pour our hearts to Him. He really yearns to be close to us and for us, His begotten children, to share our lives with Him.

In Psalm 66:7 we read: “He rules by His power forever; His eyes observe the nations.” God observes the nations. He often guides events of history as we saw before when we looked at the story of Daniel.

In Psalm 66:10 we read: “For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined.” God is our refiner. Trials bring out both the best and worst in people. When we are put under the pressure of trials it tests just how good our character really is. Will we put the needs of others ahead of our own or will we be selfish? Will we fly off the handle or will we calmly handle the situation in a godly way? The pressure of trials help mould our character and show God what we are made of.

God is described as “sitting as a refiner and purifier of silver” in Malachi 3:2-3. To be made pure gold and silver have to be heated by fire to melting point and then the impurities can be separated from the gold and silver. In the same way trials heat us up and allow God to mould us and remove the impurities of bad habits from our character as we learn lessons from them.

A silversmith has to constantly pay attention and monitor the temperature of the furnace so it doesn’t get too hot and spoil the product. God won’t give us more than we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13) and He is intimately aware of what we are going through when we go through trials. How does a silversmith know when the product is ready? When he can see his own image reflecting in it. God wants to see His character in us reflecting back at Him.

In Psalm 68:5-6 God is described the following way: “A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.” God is a father of the fatherless and a defender of widows. He looks out for those who have no-one to look out for them. He can work things out to provide people who can look after and be friends to those who are loners.
In Psalm 68:19 we read: “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits.” God is generous and daily gives us many benefits from the food and drink we enjoy, to the sunshine and rain and beautiful sunsets, to life itself which is a gift from God.

In Psalm 68:33 God is described as He “who rides on the heaven of heavens, which were of old! Indeed, He sends out His voice, a mighty voice.” In between running the universe God probably makes a few sidetrips here and there around His awesome universe.

Psalm 78 is a very powerful psalm that covers God’s dealing with Israel out of Egypt which we have already studied in detail. I quote the whole psalm where we see God’s full range of emotions in the way that He dealt with Israel. We see His anger, grief and hatred at their incredible lack of faith as well as His mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

"Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done."

"For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God."

"The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in His law, and forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them. Marvelous things He did in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea and caused them to pass through; and He made the waters stand up like a heap. In the daytime also He led them with the cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink in abundance like the depths. He also brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers."

"But they sinned even more against Him by rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness. And they tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy. Yes, they spoke against God: They said, ‘Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?’ Behold, He struck the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. ‘Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?’ Therefore the Lord heard this and was furious; so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation."

"Yet He had commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven, had rained down manna on them to eat, and given them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels’ food; He sent them food to the full. He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; and by His power He brought in the south wind. He also rained meat on them like the dust, feathered fowl like the sand of the seas; and He let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings. So they ate and were well filled, for He gave them their own desire. They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths, the wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel."

"In spite of this they still sinned, and did not believe in His wondrous works. Therefore their days He consumed in futility, and their years in fear. When He slew them, then they sought Him; and they returned and sought earnestly for God. Then they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, and they lied to Him
with their tongue; for their heart was not steadfast with Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again.

"How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power: the day when He redeemed them from the enemy, when He worked His signs in Egypt, and His wonders in the field of Zoan; turned their rivers into blood, and their streams, that they could not drink. He sent swarms of flies among them, which devoured them, and frogs, which destroyed them. He also gave their crops to the caterpillar, and their labor to the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He also gave up their cattle to the hail, and their flocks to fiery lightning. He cast on them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, and trouble, by sending angels of destruction among them.

"He made a path for His anger; He did not spare their soul from death, but gave their life over to the plague, and destroyed all the firstborn in Egypt, the first of their strength in the tents of Ham. But He made His own people go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock; and He led them on safely, so that they did not fear; but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. And He brought them to His holy border, this mountain which His right hand had acquired. He also drove out the nations before them, allotted them an inheritance by survey, and made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents. Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies, but turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers; they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their carved images.

"When God heard this, He was furious, and greatly abhorred Israel, so that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent He had placed among men, and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand. He also rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which He has established forever. He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands."

In Psalm 81:10-14 we more about God's great feeling and yearning for Israel to obey Him and be able to live a happy life.

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels. Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries."

He wants so much to do us good. Israel too often thought that their own selfish ways would bring them happiness but it only brought them trouble which God so desperately wanted to alleviate them from.

In Psalm 87:2 we read: "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." Jerusalem has a special place in God's heart.
Having been to Jerusalem I can certainly understand it. Originally I wasn’t that excited about going to Jerusalem as it looks somewhat dry and rocky in photos. However, when you get there you really get caught up in the atmosphere of the place. The Jews really look after the old city. It’s wonderful walking through the old cobblestone streets with all of its markets and taking in the smells of all the spices sold by the Arab traders. It’s also wonderful walking along the walls of the old city.

You really get caught up in the history of the place knowing that so many great events took place from Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac, David’s conquest and rule of the city to so many great events of Jesus’ life as well as His death. Going up to the Mount of Olives also gives you goosebumps when you think of how that is the very place that Christ is going to return to in a few years time and rule the world from.

In Psalm 89:8 it says of God: “Your faithfulness also surrounds You.” Psalm 93:1 tells of how God clothed with majesty and strength. “The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength. Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved.”

Psalm 95:7 describes God as our great shepherd. “For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.” The common analogy of God as our shepherd looking after us, His sheep, is used to highlight the gentleness with which He looks after us.

In Psalm 98:4 we read: “Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.” God wants us to joyful in our worship of Him. It should be a great delight to serve and worship God who has given us life and every good thing that we have. That verse speaks of shouting joyfully – great emotion.

This verse reminds me of a scene from the romantic comedy “Coming to America” with Eddie Murphy, in which he played a wealthy African prince who went to America to search for a bride. In his search he finds himself at a Pentecostal service where people are getting up in their seats and shouting hallelujah and so on. When the emotional speaker quotes this verse and says “Shout joyfully to the Lord” the African prince, not knowing the protocols of such a meeting, gets up from his seat and yells “I am very happy to be here.”

In Psalm 99:4 we read of how God loves justice. In verse 8 of the same Psalm we read: “You answered them, O Lord our God; You were to them God-Who-Forgives, though You took vengeance on their deeds.” God is not someone who holds grudges – He yearns to be merciful and forgiving though there are times He must mete out punishment to help us to learn important lessons of obedience. Psalm 102:27 shows that God is consistent – He is not fickle. “But You are the same, and Your years will have no end.”

Psalm 103 is a wonderful psalm that tells us much about God's generosity, forgiveness and mercy. “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles” (verses 2-5).

The psalm starts off by reminding us not to forget all His benefits. Just as we often have staff benefits when we work for a particular company God’s people also have fringe benefits from our relationship with Him. When we truly repent with a right heart God is rich in mercy and will forgive us of those sins. Jesus Christ’s sacrifice covers ALL our of sins. We may have a hard time believing God will forgive us of certain very bad sins but we cannot limit Christ’s sacrifice by thinking He cannot forgive certain really bad sins that we have committed.
The next “fringe benefit” mentioned in the psalm is that God promises to heal all our diseases. Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice, not only paid the penalty for our spiritual sins but also paid the penalty for our sicknesses, which are caused the transgression of physical laws. Isaiah wrote that “by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Herbert Armstrong writes the following about this benefit from God in his booklet “The Plain Truth About Healing”:

If one in the Church of God today lacks the FAITH that he should have, the penalty is NOT disfellowshipping. The penalty is that he still PAYS THE PENALTY in the form of sickness, disease or even death. He himself pays it! Too bad -- when Christ already had paid it FOR HIM. But he should be helped to receive faith -- not be disfellowshipped.

Back in 1927 or 1928, when I had only recently at the time learned God's truth about healing, I heard a most apt example of this. We did not yet cross the Atlantic in airplanes in those days. A man was sailing to Europe in a transatlantic steamship. He felt the meals aboard ship would be too expensive. So he packed in a suitcase a full supply of crackers and cheese. After three days’ sailing, he was becoming truly fed up on crackers and cheese. A steward had noticed that this passenger never went into the ship's dining room and asked him about it. "Oh, I can't afford to eat in there," replied the passenger. Then he learned that MEALS WERE INCLUDED -- no extra charge!

How many in God's Church today are on a crackers-and-cheese ration, when HEALING IS INCLUDED? JESUS CHRIST PAID FOR YOUR HEALING! Why do YOU go on PAYING THE PENALTY or else paying the DOCTOR BILLS or probably BOTH, when Jesus Christ paid it all FOR You?

Continuing on in Psalm 103 we read: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (verses 8-14).

God is merciful and slow to anger. Often we can be quick to anger when people irritate us but God is slow to anger. This doesn't mean that God doesn't get angry. It says that He will not keep His anger forever. There is a limit to God's patience before He will step in have to act on a matter. We are very lucky God's justice is tempered with mercy. Often we deserve much more of a penalty that we receive from God. God delights in giving mercy and lowering our punishment if we genuinely try and turn back in our ways to living the right way of life.

God pities us like any parent does when a child naively does things that the parent knows will hurt the child. He remembers how weak we really are spiritually without Him and that we are only weak mortal beings. He makes allowances for these things when we make mistakes.

Psalm 103:10 says that “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.” I remember a couple of times in my life where this was brought home to me in a very personal way. If there were a couple of times in my life when I least deserved God’s generosity the times of these two incidents were right up there.

In my mind I knew that God loves us at all times but at the time of the first incident I thought that the only love that God could give me was His hard or tough love. I felt extremely depressed and even
fearful of God’s rebuke. There was no way He would give the other side of love, what we might call His soft love. At least, that was what I thought.

I was looking for something else when, quite by chance, it appeared as if God directed me to a passage in a book that was everything I needed to hear at that time. It spoke of God’s incredible patience with us when we struggle with sins and compared God’s working with us like marinating a piece of tough meat. There is simply no way to rush the process. God has given us a lifetime to soak in His grace to become the people that He wants us to be. It was very moving and it was as if God was putting His arm around me and saying, "It’s OK. We have plenty of time to work on this. Look, we’ll get there in the end."

I’d like to quote a couple of passages here from that particular book by Tom Eisenman who writes:

We are supposed to enjoy the freedom of growing in Christ without the pressures of constant guilt, low self-esteem and the frustration of unreal perfectionism. This is the healthy way God has provided for our lifelong growth toward holiness. In a letter to a struggling friend C. S. Lewis wrote:

"I know all about the despair of overcoming chronic temptations. It is not serious, provided self-offended petulance, annoyance at breaking records, impatience etc. don’t get the upper hand. No amount of falls will really undo us if we keep on picking ourselves up each time. We shall of course be very muddy and tattered children by the time we reach home. But the bathrooms are all ready, the towels put out, and the clean clothes in the airing cupboard. The only fatal thing is to lose one’s temper and give it up. It is when we notice the dirt that God is most present in us; it is the very sign of His presence."

All of us have besetting sins that plague us. We become concerned with our lack of progress. The danger here lies in the possibility that we might be tricked into doubting the authenticity of our relationship with Christ on the basis of the fact that we struggle with sin. The truth is, the struggle itself is proof that God is close to us. Our sensitivity to sin is a gift of God’s Spirit. It is a sign of our salvation. There would be no inner battle if we were truly lost. Only when we can sin without remorse, with no experience of inner tension, only when sin has become easy for us are we in real danger. Then we must fall down and beg God to enter our lives afresh...

If God is at work to purify us and build us into the men He wants us to be, how can we cooperate with His important work? First, we can learn how to listen better to God and be wiser about our choices in obedience. If God wants to build your character, why not ask Him what He’s working on now. Instead of making all your own plans and driving ahead to do things your way, spend more quality time with God and train your ear to hear Him. This way you will be more able to concentrate your efforts at the same place that God is focusing His life-changing, resurrection power in your life. If we can learn to listen better to God, we will be more responsive to His step-by-step process of building holiness into our lives.

We can also be more patient with ourselves and even more patient with God. We get nowhere by trying to do too much too quickly and then crashing each time we get out ahead of God. It is good when you are going to begin a serious diet and exercise program to let your personal physician advise you. If you develop the program on your own, without understanding exactly what you need, you will probably waste a lot of time and energy and never really get where you need to go. Sometimes we take on too much too quickly and then give up in discouragement.
God knows what we really need and the steps it will take to get us there. Be satisfied to work more steadily according to God's timing and you will see real progress over time. We can learn to be more responsive to God without losing patience with ourselves. God would want us to relax more and depend more fully on His guidance, wisdom, power and grace. The key to our ability to live as free men will be whether we can internalize fully that we are forgiven, that God loves us even when we fail, and that our growth toward holiness is in God's loving and sovereign hands...

We would do well to remember that God has built into His design for us a normal duration of time for our earthly training in righteousness. He gives us no less than a lifetime. It is good to keep this in mind, otherwise we will lose patience with ourselves and try to do too much too quickly. Real and lasting change always takes time. There is no quick fix with God.

A good chef knows what a long soak in a fine marinade will do for a tough piece of meat. There is no way to slap on a glaze at the last second and get the same fine result. This is God's way with us. We soak in the marinade of His grace for a lifetime, and there is simply no way to rush the process without ruining the meat. A lifetime of soaking in the marinade of God's grace can transform even the toughest sinner into a heavenly delicacy (Temptations Men Face, p.28-30).

On another occasion, for a temporary period of time, I was stubbornly pursuing my own way on a matter and thought that God wouldn't possibly give me any blessing until I turned from my selfish pursuit. Yet again I had God figured out totally wrong. In a way that simply could not be put down to coincidence, He dropped into my lap a major blessing that had me totally stunned that He would bring into my life at that time. It was probably the biggest surprise of my life. I really learned not to underestimate God's generosity and that major blessing played a major part in leading me out of the trial that I was struggling with at the time.

In his article "The Apple of God's Eye" Jim Rector writes the following of the importance of accepting God's truly precious love for us:

We Christians, on the other hand, must not fail in this matter as did they. We must first genuinely grasp the depth and profound reality of God's love for us, and come to see the rare uniqueness of ourselves in God's sight. But we must do something else as well - something that for many of us may perhaps be the most difficult thing of all. We absolutely must come to ALLOW ourselves to fully ACCEPT God's love for us. We must be willing to receive it. We must permit ourselves to become a part of it. We must become lost in it - we must bask in it - we must revel in it! It is only when we can truly accept God's love for us, accept the fact that you and I, as individuals, are so very precious, so very meaningful, so very special, so very desired by God, that we can ever really have the deep PEACE AND JOY of the Spirit, for this is the source of it all! (p.5)

Psalm 104 describes God as a brilliant light being: "You...cover Yourself with light as with a garment, [and] stretch out the heavens like a curtain" (verses 1-2).

In Psalm 109 David seeks justice from God on those who are trying to destroy him. Some of the things that it seems like he asks for God are very harsh and seem unjust like "May his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow! May his children wander about and beg; may they be driven out of the ruins they inhabit!" (verses 9-10).

A possible explanation for this comes from the notes of some translations which note that verses 6 to 13 should be prefaced with the words "They say" meaning that this is what David's enemies are saying
about him. It’s interesting to note in these kind of prayers that David never specifically puts names to those he refers to as the wicked that he wants God to punish. He leaves that up to God to determine who are the wicked.

In **Psalm 111:2** we read: “The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them.” Those who have pleasure in God study His works which truly are magnificent. In **verse 4** of the same psalm we read: “He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and full of compassion.” It says that He is FULL of compassion – a completely devoted concern for each and every one of us.

In **Psalm 116:15** we read: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” The death of a christian is a precious moment to God because in that moment they’ve made it. God must truly delight in that victory though it will be hard on those loved ones left behind. At that moment they are then guaranteed to be there in the first resurrection at Jesus Christ’s return.

When Herbert Armstrong died in January 1986 about 6 months after I started attending church, I wondered what would be said at church to commerate his death. The first thing that I remember when I walked into church was a flower arrangement on the front of the podium with a reference to this particular verse.

**Psalm 136** is an interesting psalm and one that would have been interesting to hear when it was originally set to music. It alternates between a line of thanksgiving to God or an example of one of God’s great works with the repeated line “For His mercy endures forever.” While this repetition is mostly for its musical effect it also serves to underline one of the key emotions or qualities of God – that of showing mercy and kindness to His people.

In **Psalm 138:6** we read: “Though the Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar.” As great and mighty as God is He will bend down to us and look after us if we are lowly and humble of heart.

In **Psalm 139:13** David wrote: “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb.” God is our Creator and the one who created all the different genetic patterns that created the way we look and all of our different individual personalities. God loves the variety that He has created that is expressed in our different looks and personalities.

In **Psalm 147:3-11** we read: “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite. The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground...He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy.”

When we are down and have a broken heart God will be there to help heal our heart. It says that he counts stars by name. How incredible and how quick must God’s mind be to name the over 400 billion billion stars that scientists estimate there is in the universe! Though might and power may be great things when we see them displayed in the world around us, God takes much more pleasure in those who obey Him with a whole heart.

**Psalm 149:4** says: “For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.” God takes great joy and pleasure in His people and the Work they are doing for Him.

In **Proverbs 1:23-33** we read of God’s attitude towards the stubborn and foolish who mock and put down God and His way of life.
“Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, They would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil.”

In Proverbs 5:21 we read: “For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his paths.” God watches us carefully. He reflects all the time on the choices we make and the path we choose to follow whether good or bad.

Proverbs 6:16-19 speaks of seven things that God utterly hates with a passion: “These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.”

In Proverbs 17:5 we read: “He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.” God takes this personally and will not let such acts go unpunished.

Proverbs 20:27 says that “the spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths of his heart.” The spirit of man which God has given us and which is the difference between man and the animals is God’s lamp that allows Him to see what is in our hearts, to know what drives us and what we really want.

In Proverbs 21:1 we read: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.” God can turn people’s hearts like moving water by overloading our spirit with urges to do good or do whatever God wants us to do. Usually, though, the Holy Spirit only leads us through gentle promptings on our conscience (Romans 8:14). This is because to build true character in us the good that we do needs to be by our consent.

In Proverbs 25:2 it says: “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.” It is the glory or the honour of God to be able to conceal a matter. There are many secrets that belong to God. Throughout the Bible there are many mysteries that many of us yearn to know about but we’ll have to wait until God’s Kingdom comes and He chooses to reveal those things to us. Many of the mysteries of space and time and the spirit world are out of our reach at this time.

God’s Feelings and Personality in the Book of Isaiah

Before we look at what we can about God’s feelings and personality in the book of Isaiah let’s look briefly at how God has used prophets to convey His messages to the nation of Israel. Prophets received their call or appointment directly from God. They weren’t necessarily part of a structured religious authority. Samuel was but a child when God first spoke to him. Some were women. Some prophets, like Jeremiah or John the Baptist, were called before birth (Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:13–16).

Prophets sometimes became quite dramatic and acted out their messages. God asked them to do some strange things at times, some of which God had barred them do normally but made an exception in order to emphasize certain lessons to His people.

In Isaiah 20:1-4 we read: “In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it, at the same time the LORD spoke by Isaiah the son
of Amoz, saying, ‘Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet.’ And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the LORD said, ‘Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as prisoners and the Ethiopians as captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.’”

As a sign to Egypt and Ethiopia of their coming punishment at the hands of the Assyrians God had Isaiah walk around naked and barefoot for three years. Such a spectacle would have become quite well known after three years though I’m not sure why it was commanded for so long. I don’t think I want to picture such a thing if God asked the ministry in the church to do the same thing today to help bring attention to His message for the world.

Ezekiel lay on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 more (Ezekiel 4:4–8) to picture the number of years they would bear punishment for their sins. He was also asked to make a model of Jerusalem and in a mock battle lay siege to it to picture what would happen to Jerusalem (Ezekiel 4:1–3). To picture the famine and lack of combustible material for making fires he was also to eat and drink only a small ration each day and prepare his bread over a fire that burns with human dung (Ezekiel 4:9–17). In Ezekiel 37:15-22 God asks him to bind two sticks together picturing the re-unification of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah that will occur after Christ’s return.

Hosea’s marriage was extraordinary in that he was called by God to marry an unfaithful woman (Hosea 1:2). Just as Israel abandoned God, Gomer left her husband and returned to a life of prostitution. she was a powerful symbol of Israel’s spiritual adultery against the Lord. She seems to have ended up in the slave market, where Hosea bought her back. The prophet was demonstrating the love of God for his unfaithful people, and providing a symbol of the reconciliation that would someday take place (Hosea 3:4-5).

Now let’s look at what we can about God’s feelings and personality in the book of Isaiah.

In Isaiah 1:14 we read: "Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them." This verse doesn’t mean that God hates the Sabbath and Holy Days. They kept the form of God’s religion by taking those days off and assembling before God but the hypocritical way that they lived and the immorality they descended into made the ceremony of the religion irrelevant and useless. God doesn’t want form but substance of religion – He hates hypocrisy.

In Isaiah 1:18 God says: “’Come now, and let us reason together’, says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’”

God yearns to forgive if we are willing to repent. When you consider some of the sins God rebukes His people for in the book of Isaiah from sexual immorality and murder and bloodshed this really is a powerful scripture showing God’s sincere yearning to forgive us upon repentance for the kind of sins that many have a hard time forgiving themselves for.

In Isaiah’s vision where he sees the glory of God we read the angels cry out "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6:3). We see here emphasis put on the holiness or pureness of God from sin. It also says that the whole earth full of His glory. When you look at the fantastic array of animals and beauty that God has created all over this planet you realize that the whole earth is full of testimony to God’s greatness and creativity.

In Isaiah 9:6 we read the following description of Jesus Christ: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”
It says here that Counselor is one of Christ's names. How does He counsel us?

1] Circumstances (Acts 9:15). God will pull strings to show us what His will is. We have to be sensitive to God’s guidance and be able to wisely distinguish between what is providential and what is only coincidental in the circumstances of our life.

2] The scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15). God’s word and the examples in people's lives provided in the Bible show us how to live and what His will is.

3] The promptings of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14). Through prayer for His will God can move us and our gut feelings to settle our minds on the right choices in life.

4] The ministry (Acts 8:31). They can give us good advice based on the scriptures and from the experiences of helping others in the church.

We read of what God delights in and how he judges in Isaiah 11:3-4. It says in those verses: “His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears. But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.”

His delight or what gives Him pleasure is when we have the proper fear of Him – when we love Him and fear to disappoint Him because of the love and deep respect that we have for Him. God judges righteously but He doesn’t judge take by what people say and do but also takes into account the heart and motivations of people to judge fairly and equitably.

Isaiah 14:13 says that God’s throne is “on the farthest sides of the north”. This tends to indicate that God’s throne in heaven is somewhere around the north celestial pole. This is echoed in many pagan religions which have borrowed this concept. Pagan gods such as Ra, Shamash, Kronos and Saturn were also said to dwell there (The Tree at the Navel of the Earth, E.A.S. Butterworth & Paradise Found, William F. Warren). This is also why Santa supposedly comes from the North Pole since Christmas originates from the Roman festival, Saturnalia.

In Isaiah 19:24-25 we read of God's great delight and joy in Israel, Assyria (the Germans of today) and Egypt when they repent in the millennium: “In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, ‘Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.’”

In Isaiah 27:2-4 we read about God's personal care for Israel and His yearning to protect His people: “In that day sing to her, A vineyard of red wine! I, the Lord, keep it, I water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day. Fury is not in Me. Who would set briers and thorns against Me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together.”

In Isaiah 35:4-7 we read of God’s joy and yearning for the restoration He will bring to this world when Jesus Christ returns and sets up the Kingdom of God on earth.

“Say to those who are fearful-hearted, Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; In the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes.”

In Isaiah 40 we read: “He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young... Behold, the nations are as a
drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales; Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing...All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless...He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in... 

"To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing...Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable” (verses 11, 15, 17, 22, 25-26, 28).

These verses speak of God’s gentleness, His greatness and how the nations are but a drop in the bucket compared to Him.

Our Creator has no equal. He stretched out the heavens like a curtain. At the incredible speed of 300 000 km per second, it still takes light 4 years to get to the nearest star to the earth, Alpha Centauri, which is close to the Southern Cross. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, alone has about 100 000 million stars in it and it is 100 000 light years wide. If the orbit of the furthest planet, Pluto, was about the size of a coffee cup then the Milky Way would be the size of the entire continent of North America in comparison. And yet, the Milky Way is only one of an absolutely enormous number of galaxies in the universe. Estimates vary but there is believed to be as many as 200 000 million (200 billion) galaxies just like our own enormous galaxy!

God calls all the “host”—that is, the celestial bodies, including all the stars—by name, an amazing fact also mentioned in Psalm 147:4. It is amazing since there are at least a two hundred billion galaxies of a hundred billion stars each. Scientists estimate the universe at 15 billion years old. Yet to name every star at a rate of one per second would take more than 21,000 times that long—a mind-boggling feat that God gives but a passing mention.

Now try and think about this one. Einstein discovered that all matter is essentially made up of an incredible amount of compressed energy. When the Americans dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima which destroyed the city and killed 80 000 people, it was done by converting some of the matter in the bomb into pure energy. The amount of matter that was converted into pure energy to destroy the whole city was only ONE GRAM! One gram is about the size of a garden pea that you might eat at your dinner table.

Now if there's that much energy in that little pea, then that is how much energy it took for God to create the atoms which make up that little pea. Now, if it takes the power of a Hiroshima bomb to create a little garden pea how much would it take to create a man? How much to create the earth? How much to create the Sun? Or the galaxy? Or the entire universe full of at least 200 billion galaxies? That's how powerful God is!!!

In Isaiah 42:3-4 we read more of God’s gentleness: “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.” Albert Barnes in his commentary gives this explanation about the bruised reed and smoking flax:

The reed is an emblem of feebleness, as well as change (Matthew 11:7). A bruised, broken reed, is an emblem of the poor and oppressed. It means that he would not oppress the feeble and poor, as victorious warriors and conquerors did. It is also an expressive emblem of the soul, broken and contrite on account of sin, weeping and mourning for transgression. He will not break it. That is, he will not be haughty, unforgiving, and cruel. He will heal it, pardon it, and give it strength.
Smoking flax. This refers to the wick of a lamp when the oil is exhausted - the dying, flickering flame and smoke that hang over it. It is an emblem, also, of feebleness and infirmity. He would not further oppress it, and extinguish it. He would not be like the Jews, proud and overbearing, and trampling down the poor...He will not treat them harshly or unkindly, but will cherish the feeble flame, minister the oil of grace, and kindle it into a flame.

In **Isaiah 45:1** we read of God's ability to see and / or make the future. “Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut.”

In **Isaiah 46:9-10** we also read: "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done."

How does God see the future? Can God see things before they happen or does He make things happen? Can God know in advance what our choices will be or does He simply choose not to know ahead of time? These are intriguing questions. There are inferences that seem to indicate that God makes a prophecy and then through His power makes it happen rather than looking into the future to see what will happen and saying that will happen.

In **Luke 22:36-37** we read: “Then He said to them, 'But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.'"

It appears as if Jesus told them to do things so those prophecies would come to pass. It seemed like it wouldn’t naturally happen that way unless He did some arrangements. But how do we explain God prophesying Cyrus by name 200 years before he would conquer Babylon? I guess that wouldn’t be too hard but when one looks into the incredible specifics in the book of Revelation one gets the impression God predicts the future by looking ahead and reporting back to us. Given that the prophecies require people to do sinful things in a specific way how does God arrange that? And if God has predicted sinful people will act in such a way why doesn't Satan try and spite God by having them act a different way and “foil” the prophecy?

**Isaiah 57:15** says that God “inhabits eternity”. Does He exist in past, present and future simultaneously? It's interesting that some Hebrew scholars feel that YHVH or Yahweh, that is usually translated the Eternal or LORD, is better translated “the Timeless One”.

What is time anyway? Einstein proved that time was relative and, though we can't fathom it, he proved that time slows down the closer to the speed of light you go and this has been proven experimentally.

Did God create time? **Hebrews 7:3** says that Christ was “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.” Given that we don't understand the mystery of time is it actually possible that Jesus Christ was created before time was created?

That Christ both always existed and was not created must be the church’s incumbent teaching because of **Hebrews 7:3** and **Micah 5:2** but is there the possibility that He is both eternal and a created God being? There are some pros and cons to the alternative idea that perhaps He was a created God being. It does help better answer a few questions while complicating matters with other problems.

If God the Father somehow cloned Himself perhaps this may explain why the Word has always been subject in authority to the Father and enhance the understanding of some of the scriptures that constantly talk about the Father and the Son being one as well as why Christ is called “everlasting Father” in **Isaiah 9:6-7**.
It may also be at the heart of the gut feeling why many people have leaned in this direction on this subject. Think on this point. It's hard enough to comprehend the fact that a perfect, loving, almighty being has ALWAYS existed - but two!

An early church leader by the name of Hippolytus (170-236 AD), a Greek, who was the disciple of Irenaeus (a disciple of Polycarp) wrote the following in His book “The Refutation of All Heresies”:

"Therefore this solitary and supreme Deity, by an exercise of reflection, brought forth the Logos first... Him alone He produced from existing things; for the Father Himself constituted existence, and the being born from him was the cause of all things that are produced."

A major drawback of this idea is how did Christ develop His perfect character if He was created? If God can create a perfect God being by fiat then why didn't He do it with us also? I'm not convinced of this alternate point of view but given our inability to grasp the concept of time I'm personally not completely ruling it out either.

The prophet Isaiah wrote that "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). It wasn't just Christ's death, pictured by His shed blood, which paid the penalty for our sins. The physical torture that He went through was also a part of paying the penalty for our sins. Death is the ultimate penalty for sin but along the way we go through all kinds of pain and suffering.

We are told that "by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). The Passover also reminds us of the blessing of healing and the forgiveness of our breaking the physical laws which cause sickness and disease.

In Isaiah 53:4 we read: "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." Griefs and sorrows are neither spiritual nor physical afflictions – they are, in fact, emotional afflictions. God here appears to be highlighting the importance of emotional healing, which spiritual and physical healing are both closely connected to.

Time can heal most emotional wounds caused by our own sins or those of others but some of those wounds can become infected and deeply affect us emotionally. Like physical healing, God is quite prepared to help heal us emotionally when we bring these things to Him and ask Him in faith to heal us on the inside (James 5:16).

How generous is God's forgiveness? Is there a limit to God's forgiveness for bad enough sins that are repented of? We read of God forgiveness in Isaiah 55:7 where it says: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." God's forgiveness is incredibly generous upon repentance.

In the next verse we read of how differently God thinks to how we look at things: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). God thinks so differently than we do. He can see things far off that we can't. Often God doesn't make sense to us but He sees dangers and opportunities that we can't see which gives God such a greater perspective. God likes to surprise us and do things differently to emphasise His greatness so that it will keep us humble and reliant on Him.

In Isaiah 57:15-18 we read: ‘For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity
of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry, and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners."

God’s holiness. God is so much higher and mightier than we are. He shows grace and encourages and revives those who are humble before Him. There are times, like a human parent does at times, when He is so upset that He turn His back on those who rebel against Him (“I don’t want to see you”). His anger, though, is short-lived and He will heal us and comfort us.

In Isaiah 58:5-8 we read of God’s attitude to the religious act of fasting: “Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.”

God is not interested in penance – us hurting ourselves to please or reconcile with Him. He wants fasting to make a difference in how we live our lives so that we are more kind and generous to others.

In Isaiah 58:13-14 we read of God’s attitude toward the Sabbath which He created to be a blessing for mankind: “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

God wants us to take delight and really enjoy the Sabbath and He wants us to delight in spending time getting to know Him through prayer and study and learning about His ways when we meet together for church on the Sabbath.

We are told in Exodus 20:8 to “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” We are to remember it and not to forget how important it is. Holy means something that has been separated to be used for God’s purpose, whether it’s a fallible human being called into the church or time in the case of the Sabbath. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote the following regarding God’s Sabbath:

“[Like Moses being asked to take his shoes off when he came near God’s presence in the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-5)] God commands: ‘Take your foot off My HOLY TIME! Quit trampling all over that which is HOLY and SACRED TO ME! Quit profaning MY HOLY THINGS -- whether it be MY name, My tithe of your income, or MY holy day’... You cannot KEEP a day HOLY, unless God has first made it holy, any more than you can keep cold water hot -- unless it has first been made hot! God made this space of time HOLY -- He commands you to keep it that way!” (Which Day is the Christian Sabbath, p.27).

In Isaiah 58:13-14 there are three categories of things that we are to strive to avoid on the Sabbath – 1) Doing your own ways 2) Finding your own pleasure 3) Speaking your own words. Notice that the emphasis is on God. Our own ways has to do with our employment, studies and those things involved in helping us make a living or our physical maintenance. Finding our own pleasure involves our
hobbies, sports and other personal interests while our own words means the everyday things we talk about that don’t involve God.

The Sabbath day is a test. How we react to this day and how we feel on this day reflects whether or not we love the Lord our God with all our heart and all our might and all our soul.

The word delight in Isaiah 58:13 originally comes from a Hebrew word where you get the word luxury from, you get the word pleasant or soft or delicate. Now God is telling us that the Sabbath is something that brings a softness, a pleasantness or delight in our lives. The Sabbath is a luxury to the people of God.

This day is not a day that we establish our own righteousness on like the Jews. They became embroiled in their own do’s and don’ts and they made the Sabbath a burden by their own traditions and not properly observing it as God intended. This is a day we seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

It is a day that God has given to us so we can withdraw from the treadmill and the distractions and the hassles and begin to realize there is meaning to life. We should make sure in our Christian life that we do understand why we were called and what it means to be a Christian in God's church and be refreshed in the clarity of that vision and that purpose. It is a day to be physically refreshed and to be refreshed in God's way of life and the purpose of human life.

Why doesn’t God intervene in our lives at times? In Isaiah 59:1-2 God provides us with a common reason for His lack of action: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

God’s hand is not shortened – He really is almighty and CAN do truly anything in seemingly impossible situations. It can often be our sins which can separate us from God at times and limit God’s intervention. We can limit Him with either a lack of faith and or a lack of obedience.

At other times God will say no, not because we lack faith or obedience, but because He sees dangers for us if we had what we asked for or He might see a better opportunity on the horizon than the one we have asked for. Garth Brooks in one of his songs says that some of God's best gifts are unanswered prayer. The example he used in his song was of praying for a particular girl he was interested in but ending up with someone much better suited for him down the track.

We often speak of the Work of God in the church. Isaiah 61:1-4 gives us some insights into what God's work is all about:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations.

God's work involves a whole range of good works from preaching the gospel, healing and encouraging people and proclaiming freedom from sin.
In Isaiah 63:7-10 we read more of how Israel grieved the Holy Spirit and "broke" God's heart with how unfaithful they were to Him. God was hurt whenever He saw Israel hurt through their own sins or being mistreated by the nations around them:

"I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses. For He said, 'Surely they are My people, children who will not lie.' So He became their Saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them."

Israel will eventually repent and be brought back to Him at Jesus Christ's return which Isaiah speaks about throughout his book.

In Isaiah 66:2 we read: "For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,' says the Lord. 'But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.'"

God appreciates those who are contrite and tremble at His word. Those who are moved by what He has to say and are conscientious and deeply revere Him are looked highly upon by God.

**God’s Feelings and Personality in the Book of Jeremiah**

In Jeremiah 2 we about God's feelings and the betrayal He felt as the House of Israel and the House of Judah rebelled against Him.

"Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: 'I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; disaster will come upon them,' says the Lord.'" (Jeremiah 2:1-3).

Like a husband looking back to the joyful time of courting his wife when they originally came together God looked back fondly on the time when they entered the land of Canaan and they followed His ways at the time of the conquest of the land. Israel was special to God just like a man’s wife is very special and precious to him. God was protective of them just as a husband is protective of his wife.

"Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord: 'What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, have followed idols, And have become idolaters? Neither did they say, 'Where is the Lord,' who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought and the shadow of death, through a land that no one crossed and where no one dwelt?' I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; the rulers also transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.

"'Therefore I will yet bring charges against you,' says the Lord, 'And against your children’s children I will bring charges. For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see, send to Kedar and consider diligently, and see if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; Be very desolate,' says the Lord. 'For My people have committed two evils: They
have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:4-15).

Like a betrayed husband would ask a cheating wife, God asks “What did I do to deserve this?” They tasted what the true God was like with all His power and glory, unlike the nations around them who worshipped gods who were not real. Israel, having tasted the real God working for them, should have known better than to turn to false gods after experiencing the real thing.

God highlights two evils that Israel has done. Firstly, they have rejected Him and His ways, the true source of happiness. Secondly they replaced Him with false gods who are like “broken cisterns that cannot hold water” – they cannot bring us the true happiness and prosperity that we all crave. Our modern Israelite nations are doing the same thing. Some of the false gods our peoples are turning to include evolution, humanism, materialism and sexual immorality. As a result of these evils God will punish modern Israel, just as He punished ancient Israel unless there is a change of heart and attitude from our peoples.

“They and their kings and their princes, and their priests and their prophets, [say] to a tree, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave birth to me.’ For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble they will say, ‘Arise and save us.’ But where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble; for according to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah” (Jeremiah 2:26-28).

These words from God to those in ancient Israel who turned from God to worshipping idols they built with wood and stone could just as easily be directed by God to the “educated” people today who push the theory of evolution. They cried out to God only when they were in deep trouble and were threatened by the nations around them. God is saying, "Why should I help you when you still worship other gods? If you want help why don't you cry out to those gods and then you'll see that they are false gods who can't save you.”

God says the following to both ancient Israel and our modern Israelite nations in Jeremiah 5:7-9: "How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken me and sworn by those that are not gods. When I had fed them to the full then they committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses. They were like well-fed lusty stallions; every one neighed after his neighbor's wife. Shall I not punish them for these things says the Lord. And shall I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?"

God hates the sexual immorality that our society is obsessed with and He deeply feels for the incredible penalties our society is bringing upon itself as a result of those sins.

One youth leader in describing how saturated our western nations are with sexual stimuli puts it this way:

"We live in a sex-saturated society that constantly bombards all of us with erotic stimuli. Suggestive poses and near-nude bodies are just a glance away. Come-on eyes peer at us from colorful, provocative ads on television, in magazines and on billboards” (Sex – Desiring the Best, B.St-Clair and B.Jones, Here’s Life’s Publishers, 1987, p. 104-105).

The Sunday Times has stated that:

"America has become addicted to porn. Encouraged by the liberal atmosphere of the Clinton era, adult entertainment has grown into a $10 billion-a-year business. As much as $4.2 million is generated by videos alone...Americans spend more on hardcore porn, telephone sex and strip clubs than they do at the [regular] cinemas".
It’s not just our men who have strayed so much in this area. So many of our women have also joined in the hedonistic ways of our men in our western society. Many are self-centered and deliberately sexually provocative. Spurred on by teen idols and TV shows such as “Sex in the City” women have been becoming more aggressive sexually, including teenage girls. We see young girls today imitating the immodest fashions of female rock stars. Sadly, too, there is no shortage of women who will pose provocatively and feed the pornographic industry in our western nations.

God created sex. It was His idea. Contrary to some long-held opinions, He wants us to enjoy an abundantly pleasurable and stable sexual relationship within marriage. In that context, our sexuality endows us with the capacity to convey our appreciation, tenderness, devotion and love to our mate. It can add immeasurably to our sense of well-being and contentment...

But of adultery God warns: ‘Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent’ (Proverbs 6:27-29)...The social and personal harm brought by sexual immorality is so pervasive that it defies our ability to quantify its toll in human suffering. Most people simply refuse to contemplate its staggering consequences...As the proverb says, ‘whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul’ (Proverbs 6:32). Adultery’s first casualty is the damage to our mind and character...

Consider the disastrous effects of the sexual revolution. The explosion in sexually transmissible diseases (STDs) is an international disgrace. STDs account for many of the most commonly reported infectious diseases in the world. AIDS alone takes a frightening toll in lives and suffering and rivals the most deadly epidemics in history. Treatments and medical research for cures are expensive. Ironically, all this is avoidable because these diseases are spread almost exclusively through sexual promiscuity or perverted practices...

Divorce makes for even deeper personal problems. Custody fights go on for years. Children become pawns in a tug of war between parents for their love and loyalty. Children’s grades suffer; some drop out of school. Teenagers in turn become parents at younger and younger ages.

Long before a divorce, emotional and psychological damage is often inflicted on the mate and children of the sexually unfaithful. Many are permanently scarred from disillusionment, shame and a loss of a sense of self-worth. In these situations, a home can no longer provide the warmth, comfort and security that builds confidence and hope. Lack of hope contributes to suicides, which after accidents are the leading cause of death among teenagers and young adults. Such tragedies can occur years after the sowing of the seeds of despair.

The psychological cost of betrayal, rejection and abandonment is staggering. The spirit of millions is submerged in anger, depression and bitterness because their trust in one whom they loved—whether mate or parent—has been betrayed. Many of these people are emotionally distorted for life. Some of them seek counseling, but others look for vengeance. The problems go on and on. Who said no one gets hurt? Adultery and promiscuity are tickets to social disaster. The real cost of sexual immorality is astronomical (UCG booklet, “The Ten Commandments, p.49-52).

Is it any wonder that God hates the sexual immorality we see all around us in our Israelite nations. He yearns for us to enjoy life free of the problems that sexual sin brings upon people.
In **Jeremiah 7:16-18** we read: "Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you. Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger.”

They provoked God’s anger so many times in ancient Israel that they reached a point of no return. God’s patience with us is great but there comes a point when He won’t relent of punishment after a certain point of stubbornness.

In **Jeremiah 7:30-31** we read: “‘For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight,’ says the Lord. ‘They have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to pollute it. ‘And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart.’”

The burning of children to supposedly give the best to their pagan gods was the height of abomination to God. God never commanded that they give their firstborn children to Him in such a way. He didn’t command it and it was the furthest thing from what He wanted. The firstborn children of God were originally dedicated to God but not as a slain sacrifice to be killed to “prove” their love for Him. Human life is precious to God. The firstborn were dedicated to serve God not die for Him but God substituted the Levites to serve Him in place of all the tribes’ firstborn children (**Numbers 8:18**).

Today we can ask whether the horrible sin of abortion is any different to the Israelites burning their firstborn children. Many thought they were sincerely honouring the gods and “proving” their love giving up their children. Today most abortions are done for reasons of convenience. Since the fateful decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1973 court case "Roe v Wade" which legalized abortion, there have been over 30 million abortions in the United States. That is over a tenth of the entire population of the United States or some five times the number of Jews exterminated by the Nazis in the holocaust! According to US. News & World Report:

“[Few] statistics exist illustrating, why women get abortions. In the last survey, in 1987, 76 percent said they were concerned about how having a baby could change their lives, and 51 percent had problems with a relationship or wanted to avoid single parenthood. Thirty percent cited health of the fetus; 7 percent the health of the mother; 1 percent rape or incest. A U.S. News survey found, surprisingly, that even for most abortions occurring in the 20th week or later the health of the fetus or mother was a relatively minor factor in the decision to have an abortion” (**Abortions in America**, U.S. News & World Report, Jan. 19, 1998).

What these statistics illustrate is that close to 80% of those women who had abortions sought it for the sake of convenience. Some 20% of abortions involve women who are married and simply don’t want any more children so they are prepared to have their unborn children killed.

In the Albert Barnes Bible Commentary we read the following description of the hideous sin of burning children that went on in ancient Israel in the Valley of Hinnom, also known in the New Testament as gehenna (hell) where the incorrigibly wicked will be cast after the Great White Throne Judgment period:

This was formerly a pleasant valley, near to Jerusalem, on the south side (or south east). A small brook or torrent usually ran through this valley, and partly encompassed the city. This valley the idolatrous Israelites devoted formerly to the horrid worship of Moloch (**2 Kings 16:3; 2 Chronicles 28:3**). In that worship the ancient Jewish writers inform us that the idol of Moloch was of brass, adorned with
a royal crown, having the head of a calf, and his arms extended, as if to embrace anyone. When they offered children to him, they heated the statue within by a great fire; and when it was burning hot, they put the miserable children into his arms, where it was soon consumed by the heat. And in order that the cries of the child might not be heard, they made a great noise with drums and other instruments about the idol. These drums were called 'Toph' and hence a common name of the place was 'Tophet' (Jeremiah 7:31, 32).

In Jeremiah 9:23-24 God tells us about what He delights in and what we should also revel in: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight.”

We should glory and be excited about knowing God and developing His righteousness. God delights in us understanding who He is and that He is a good and kind God.

In Jeremiah 10:18-19 God speaks of how He feels hurt because of the way that Israel has turned from Him: “For thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will throw out at this time the inhabitants of the land, and will distress them, that they may find it so. Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is severe. But I say, 'Truly this is an infirmity, and I must bear it.'”

Love is never free from risk. C.S. Lewis put it well when he said:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly be broken. If you don't want your heart broken then don't give it to anyone, not even to an animal.

God loves us all when most of us don't love back so God willingly takes on the risk of emotional hurt when He invests so much of Himself in doing good to us and building a relationship with us.

In Jeremiah 15:1-6 we read: “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth’...’You have forsaken Me,’ says the Lord, ‘You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am weary of relenting!’ Notice God says here that weary of giving them more chances. It hurt God that they kept on disappointing Him with their rebellious ways.

In Jeremiah 18 we read: “The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: ‘Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.’ Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.

“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the Lord. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it” (verses 1-10).

God can do with His creation as He wants to. God made us and He can do with us as He wishes. We need the humility to acknowledge that in our thoughts and our actions. About this analogy of us being a clay pot in God’s hands, Herbert Armstrong in “The Incredible Human Potential” writes:
The human MAN is made literally from CLAY. God is like the master potter forming and shaping a vessel out of clay. But if the clay is too hard, it will not bend into the form and shape he wants. If it is too soft and moist, it lacks firmness to “STAY PUT” where the potter bends it. Notice in Isaiah 64:8: "But now, O [Eternal], thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand."

Yet God has given each of us a MIND OF HIS OWN. If one REFUSES to acknowledge God or God’s ways -- refuses to repent of the wrong and turn to the right, God cannot take him and create Godly character in him. But the human CLAY must be pliable, must yield willingly. If the human stiffens up and resists, he is like clay that is too dry and stiff. The potter can do nothing with it. It will not give and bend. Also, if he is so lacking in will, purpose, and determination that he won’t "stay put" when God molds him partly into what God wants him to be -- too wishy-washy, weak, lacking root of character, he will never endure to the end. He will lose out.

We are, in truth, the WORK OF HIS HANDS. Yet WE ourselves must do our part in this spiritual development. If we lazily neglect Bible study and prayer -- or if we let other material interests become more important and we NEGLECT such great salvation, we lose out. But if we have the strength of character to YIELD, OF OUR OWN WILL to put ourselves in God's hands, HE will instill within us His SPIRIT and by it His righteousness -- open our minds to His spiritual knowledge.

We must be GOD'S righteousness, for all of OURS is like filthy rags to Him. He continually instills His knowledge, His righteousness, His character within us -- IF we diligently seek it and want it. BUT WE HAVE OUR VERY IMPORTANT PART IN IT. Then all credit goes to GOD. As we receive the CHARACTER OF GOD through the Holy Spirit of God, more and more God is REPRODUCING HIMSELF IN US. Finally, in the resurrection, we shall be as God -- in a position where we cannot sin, because we ourselves have set it so and have turned FROM sin and have struggled and struggled AGAINST sin and overcome sin. God’s PURPOSE WILL be accomplished! (p.81-82).

We read of God’s deep feeling for Ephraim in Jeremiah 31:20. “Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord.”

We see here God’s deep feeling for Ephraim when He says, “My DEAR son...My heart yearns for him.” When you have a personal investment in people it hurts when they turn away. You long for a wayward child but you realize that you have to let them make their own mistakes for a while.

God's Feelings and Personality in the Book of Ezekiel

Now we look at what we can about God’s feelings and personality in the book of Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel 9 we read: “Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer’s inkhorn at his side; and the LORD said to him, ‘Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.’ To the others He said in my hearing, ‘Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary.’ So they began with the elders who were before the temple. Then He said to them, ‘Defile the temple, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!’ And they went out and killed in the city.”

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“So it was, that while they were killing them, I was left alone; and I fell on my face and cried out, and said, ‘Ah, Lord God! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?’ Then He said to me, ‘The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; for they say, ‘The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see!’ And as for Me also, My eye will neither spare, nor will I have pity, but I will recompense their deeds on their own head.’ Just then, the man clothed with linen, who had the inkhorn at his side, reported back and said, ‘I have done as You commanded me’” (verses 3-11).

There were pagan statutes and open pagan worship being done in the very Temple of God and immorality and violence had reached epic proportions in the land without any sign of national repentance despite God sending prophet after prophet to warn the nation of the consequences of their sins. God is slow to anger but there comes a point when His anger builds up to where it is hot and He must execute harsh judgment to punish and correct His people. They had defiled the Temple with paganism so God would defile the Temple with their slain bodies. In the midst of this destruction there was a remnant of people who did want to obey God and who didn't go along with the majority. God recognized those who cared for the people and for God's ways and who sighed and cried for the abominations that were done in the land. God protected those people.

In Ezekiel 16 we read of God's deep feelings for Israel as he courted and married Israel and then the pain that He went through when He had to divorce Himself from His people.

"Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: 'Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born. And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’" (verses 1-6).

Israel as a nation was born during the days of the sojourning of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the land of Canaan. "Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.” The term Amorite means "westerter" in the sense of being west of the major Mesopotamian civilizations. Abraham came from the city of Ur in northern Mesopotamia which is today called Urfa in southern Turkey. This area later was part of the Hittite empire. In its early days as a nation in Egypt one of Egypt's pharaohs tried to kill all the male children and stop Israel's dramatic growth but God continued to bless their population growth despite the short-lived edict to kill all the male Hebrew children. God had compassion on Israel like someone would have compassion on an abandoned baby left to wallow in its own filth.

"I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,' says the Lord God. ‘Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,’ says the Lord God” (verses 7-14).
When Israel grew up as a nation God cared for and courted her like a man would care for a court a young lady. God adorned Israel with great beauty after rescuing her from Egypt. God courted and married Israel now that she had grown up from a baby into beautiful woman in this analogy. The passage might humorously be thought of to picture God as a cradle-snatcher but we should remember that it is only an analogy.

God provided for Israel's every need and blessed them with His laws and statutes. There were times when Israel obeyed God and they were greatly blessed physically with wealth and splendour and Israel's fame and splendour went out among the nations. God reminds Israel that all she had was due to His grace not through her greatness.

"But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen, nor be. You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them. You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you set My oil and My incense before them. Also My food which I gave you—the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey which I fed you—you set it before them as sweet incense; and so it was,' says the Lord God. 'Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured.

Israel forgot what God had done to her and was unfaithful in every way – forsaking God and His ways and worshipping all the pagan gods around her. One of the sins which most horrified God was sacrificing their children and burning them with fire to please foreign gods like Molech. "Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured." God reminds them that the children that they bore were also His and He ached that Israel would kill His children like that.

"Then it was so, after all your wickedness—'Woe, woe to you!' says the Lord God—'that you also built for yourself a shrine, and made a high place for yourself in every street. You built your high places at the head of every road, and made your beauty to be abhorred. You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry. You also committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your very fleshly neighbors, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke Me to anger. Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. You also played the harlot with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; indeed you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied. How degenerate is your heart!' says the Lord God, 'seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot.

"You erected your shrine at the head of every road, and built your high place in every street. Yet you were not like a harlot, because you scorned payment. You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband. Men make payment to all harlots, but you made your payments to all your lovers, and hired them to come to you from all around for your harlotry. You are the opposite of other women in your harlotry, because no one solicited you to be a harlot. In that you gave payment but no payment was given you, therefore you are the opposite.

"Now then, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God: 'Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotry with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children which you gave to them, surely, therefore, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved, and all those you hated;
I will gather them from all around against you and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. And I will judge you as women who break wedlock or shed blood are judged; I will bring blood upon you in fury and jealousy. I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your shrines and break down your high places. They shall also strip you of your clothes, take your beautiful jewelry, and leave you naked and bare. They shall also bring up an assembly against you, and they shall stone you with stones and thrust you through with their swords. They shall burn your houses with fire, and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; and I will make you cease playing the harlot, and you shall no longer hire lovers. So I will lay to rest My fury toward you, and My jealousy shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and be angry no more. Because you did not remember the days of your youth, but agitated Me with all these things, surely I will also recompense your deeds on your own head,' says the Lord GOD. 'And you shall not commit lewdness in addition to all your abominations.

"Indeed everyone who quotes proverbs will use this proverb against you: 'Like mother, like daughter!' You are your mother's daughter, loathing husband and children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and children; your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite. Your elder sister is Samaria, who dwells with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who dwells to the south of you, is Sodom and her daughters. You did not walk in their ways nor act according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you became more corrupt than they in all your ways. As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done. Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit. Samaria did not commit half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all the abominations which you have done. You who judged your sisters, bear your own shame also, because the sins which you committed were more abominable than theirs; they are more righteous than you. Yes, be disgraced also, and bear your own shame, because you justified your sisters.

"When I bring back their captives, the captives of Sodom and her daughters, and the captives of Samaria and her daughters, then I will also bring back the captives of your captivity among them, that you may bear your own shame and be disgraced by all that you did when you comforted them. When your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters return to their former state, then you and your daughters will return to your former state. For your sister Sodom was not a byword in your mouth in the days of your pride, before your wickedness was uncovered. It was like the time of the reproach of the daughters of Syria and all those around her, and of the daughters of the Philistines, who despise you everywhere. You have paid for your lewdness and your abominations,' says the LORD. 'For thus says the Lord GOD: 'I will deal with you as you have done, who despised the oath by breaking the covenant. Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed, when you receive your older and your younger sisters; for I will give them to you for daughters, but not because of My covenant with you. And I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done,' says the Lord God'" (verses 24-63).

Israel in the way she played the harlot with all the nations and gods around her only cared about what felt good at the time regardless of the painful consequences down the track and regardless of the pain she caused to her true husband, God. God's anger and jealousy became hot and He let her lovers - the nations she played the harlot with abuse her terribly and teach her the lesson not to be unfaithful.

Does God take any pleasure in killing people when they are wicked and will not turn back to Him? We read of what God's feelings on this are in Ezekiel 18:
"If a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord God, 'and not that he should turn from his ways and live? But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.

"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?

"Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,' says the Lord God. 'Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,' says the Lord God. 'Therefore turn and live!'" (verses 21-32).

God is not interested in afflicting pain on people because He is angry and takes pleasure in punishing people. He only inflicts corrective pain for the purpose of bringing people back in line with His way of life since He knows it is the only way to true peace and happiness for us and other people who are affected by our actions. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He only desires repentance and reconciliation with Him.

In Ezekiel 20 we read a dual prophecy about ancient and modern-day Israel:

"Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, and were not careful to observe My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them'; but they profaned My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the wilderness. Nevertheless I withdrew My hand and acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the Gentiles, in whose sight I had brought them out. Also I raised My hand in an oath to those in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the Gentiles and disperse them throughout the countries, because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers' idols. Therefore I also gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live; and I pronounced them unclean because of their ritual gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through the fire, that I might make them desolate and that they might know that I am the L ORD" (verses 21-26).

Ancient Israel began the progression of disobedience with profaning and rejecting God's Sabbath and Holy Days. That was the beginning point which led onto so many other sins because without keeping the proper form of religion and regularly assembling to hear God's words they drifted further and further away from God. The height of their abominations was pictured by the atrocious sin of offering their children to foreign gods by burning them to those gods.

"'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I
will plead My case with you,' says the Lord God. 'I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; 38 I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

"As for you, O house of Israel,' thus says the Lord God: 'Go, serve every one of you his idols—and hereafter—if you will not obey me; but profane My holy name no more with your gifts and your idols. For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel,' says the Lord God, 'there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things. I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers. And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel,' says the Lord God" (Ezekiel 20:33-44).

In the end-time after our modern day Israelite nations go into captivity there will be an Exodus even greater than that which occurred in Moses’ day. Before they return to the Holy Land God will prepare them first in the wilderness and make the new covenant with them and give them His Holy Spirit. They will loathe themselves because of their sins but God will have great mercy and forgive them of their sins. Then they will finally be faithful to Him which God will take great delight and pleasure in.

In the February 2003 issue of "World News and Prophecy" Cecil Maranville makes these comments about Ezekiel 33:10-20 and compares it to the massive system of homeland security that the United States has initiated to protect itself from terrorism. God's protection has a price does have a price – obeying Him and His laws yet this is completely ignored in the American homeland security system. Cecil Maranville writes:

[The] massive system of homeland security will be for nothing. If we want God's blessing, we have to live the way He says we should live. Just as with the physical aspect of security, we have to pay the price for divine protection.

God spoke in the same terms, "all or nothing," in His conversation with Ezekiel. Continuing from where we left off above: "Ezekiel, son of man, the people of Israel are complaining that the punishment for their sins is more than they can stand. They have lost all hope for survival, and they blame me. Tell them that as surely as I am the living LORD God, I don't like to see wicked people die. I enjoy seeing them turn from their sins and live. So if the Israelites want to live, they must stop sinning and turn back to me."

In modern parlance, if people want divine protection, they must stop their ways of living that trample down God's laws and teachings. Telling people that will likely evoke this response, "What about all the good things I do?"

When speaking of the security of nations, we must not mince our words. Hundreds of millions of lives are at stake. We need to understand plainly that doing "some good" is not the same as living by God's laws and teachings.

God's words to Ezekiel are prescient, piercing through the façade of "good people" today who flatly refuse to subject themselves to the kind of structured religion He speaks of in the Bible. Lest we misunderstand and think that this means God is
harsh, please take note of His ready promise of mercy along with His high standards for human behavior.

"Tell them that when good people start sinning, all the good they did in the past cannot save them from being punished. And remind them that when wicked people stop sinning, their past sins will be completely forgiven, and they won't be punished.

"Suppose I promise good people that they will live, then later they start sinning and believe they will be saved by the good they did in the past. These people will certainly be put to death because of their sins. Their good deeds will be forgotten.

"Suppose I warn wicked people that they will die because of their sins, and they stop sinning and start doing right. For example, they need to return anything they have taken as security for a loan and anything they have stolen. Then if they stop doing evil and start obeying my Law, they will live. Their past sins will be forgiven, and they will live because they have done right."

Do you think that Americans or other people of the Western world would take kindly to being told that they do not please God? And that as a result, He will not protect them from terror? They probably would not believe what this article is saying. If they did accept what the Bible says, they would howl about how unfair God is.

Anticipating the predictability of human reasoning, God is again "on point." "Ezekiel, your people accuse me of being unfair. But they are the ones who are unfair. If good people start doing evil, they will be put to death, because they have sinned. And if wicked people stop sinning and start doing right, they will save themselves from punishment. But the Israelites still think I am unfair. So warn them that they will be punished for what they have done" (quotes taken from Ezekiel 33:10-20, Contemporary English Version) (p.4).

**God’s Feelings and Personality in the Minor Prophets**

The Book of Hosea serves as a powerful object lesson of what God has gone through with His people Israel. The New Living Translation begins the introduction to this book with the comment that it is "a tragic love story with a happy ending." The commentary of the "Word in Life Bible" says the following about the book of Hosea:

"Hosea’s marriage was extraordinary in that he was called [by God] to marry an unfaithful woman (Hosea 1.2). Gomer’s exact background is not known, but it could be that she had been unfaithful to a previous husband, or she might have been a prostitute. She might have been the particular kind of prostitute that was associated with some of the pagan religions that were being practiced then in Israel. Whatever Gomer’s background, she was a powerful symbol of Israel’s spiritual adultery against the Lord (2.2) ...

"Just as Israel abandoned God, Gomer left her husband and returned to a life of prostitution. She seems to have ended up in the slave market, where Hosea bought her back for fifteen pieces of silver and some grain (3.2). This was not much money, just the common price of a slave (compare Exodus 21.32). But it was a great sacrifice of love on Hosea’s part. The prophet was demonstrating the love of God for his unfaithful people, and providing a symbol of the reconciliation that would someday take place (Hosea 3.4, 5)” ("Prodigal Wife, Prodigal People," 1998, p. 1287).
Hosea 4:1-3 highlights many of the problems we see in our modern Israelite nations today such as adultery, family breakdown, lying, stealing, profanity and environmental pollution.

"Hear the word of the Lord, You children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: 'There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea will be taken away."

In verses 6 and 7 of the same chapter God says through the prophet Hosea: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me. Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. 'The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame."

Ironically, in what is the information age, our Israelite nations our peoples are being destroyed because of a lack of knowledge – the knowledge of God’s law and way of life which so many in our western nations have rejected. Our children are suffering because of this rejection of God's law. "The more they increased” – the physically richer our nations have become “the more they sinned against me” says the Eternal.

In Hosea 8:7 God says that "they sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind." Our western nations have suffered terribly as every possible social problem has greatly risen in over the last few decades.

Hosea is a tragic love story with a happy ending. For their unfaithfulness to God our modern Israelite nations will go into a terrible captivity to humble them and bring them back to God. At that time they will repent and become the model nation that God has purposed for our Israelite nations since the day He courted the and brought them out from Egypt so long ago.

We read more of God's feelings at how the people of Israel betrayed God like a wife betraying her husband in Hosea 2:1-7: "Say to your brethren, 'My people,' And to your sisters, 'Mercy is shown.' Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and expose her, as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst. I will not have mercy on her children, for they are the children of harlotry. For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.’ Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; Yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now.’"

Further down the same chapter in Hosea 2:14-20 we read: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. ‘And it shall be, in that day,’ says the Lord, ‘That you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer call Me ‘My Master,’ for I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more. In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, to make them lie down safely. I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.”
Just as Hosea took his unfaithful wife back so too will God take Israel back. God will again be tender for her again when she repents at Christ’s return.

In Hosea 11:3-8 we read: "I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them...How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.”

He has great sympathy and yearning for Israel. He was like a father to Israel in the way He nurtured them from their earliest days and helped them become the prosperous nation they became. Imagine God’s feelings as He has to give them up to be punished.

In a dual prophecy to both ancient Israel and to the modern day descendants of Israel, God tells His people in Amos 4:7-10:

"I also withheld rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I caused it to rain on one city, and caused it not to rain from another city: one part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet you have not returned to me, says the LORD. I blasted you with blight and mildew when your gardens increased. Your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees, the locust devoured them: Yet you have not returned to me, says the LORD. I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt...yet you have not returned to me, says the LORD.”

We are experiencing weird weather patterns with El Nino and increasing natural disasters and diseases. God is sending judgments on our peoples to get our attention so that we might turn back to Him. These judgments are increasing all the time and yet our peoples are not turning back to God.

Our nations are on a collision course with God over their national sins if they don’t repent. While the chances of our Israelite nations collectively turning back to God on a national level are remote, individually people can be blessed and protected by God at that time if they turn to God and follow His laws. God promises to protect those who truly turn to Him in heartfelt, dedicated repentance and become a part of His true church (Revelation 3:10-11, 12:14).

In Amos 4:11-12 God says: “I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a firebrand plucked from the burning: yet you have not returned to me, says the LORD. Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel: Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”

Through the many warning-judgments and natural disasters God is allowing to come upon our Israelite nations He has been trying to get our attention to our collective sins as a people “yet you have not returned to me, says the LORD”. Now He is saying to our nations "Prepare to meet your Maker!"

One time when God said to an ancient Gentile nation “Prepare to meet your Maker!” was to Assyria in the days of the prophet Jonah. Amazingly the cruel Assyrians repented for a time after God’s warning message through Jonah. God was moved by the rare example of Nineveh repenting. He must have thought, “Well look at that!”  He relented from punishing Assyria which did not please Jonah who had some lessons to learn about what love is all about as exemplified in God’s actions in the story of Jonah. Like with Jonah and Assyria God is compassionate and gives us plenty of room to change. The UCG Bible Reading Program makes these comments about the Book of Jonah and God’s loving approach to Jonah and the Assyrians:

The book of Jonah reveals a great deal about God’s mercy. With regard to Nineveh, the Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible makes this comment: “Is God’s salvation available even to such people? For God to be so concerned about the positive future of nations such as Assyria was intolerable to some: How could God think of saving a
nation that had so devastated God’s own people? Jonah himself is a type representing certain pious Israelites who posed such a question regarding the extension of God’s mercy to the wicked. *God’s way with the world, not simply with Israel, is the way of mercy in the face of deserved judgment* ("Jonah," 2000, emphasis added). As God states through the apostle James, "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

The story begins with Jonah’s call by God to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, founded by Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah (Genesis 10:8-12). Like so many others, Jonah didn’t want to go—but unlike any other recorded scriptural examples of God’s true servants, Jonah not only refused to go, but he actually tried to run from God. Jonah later gives his reason as objection to God’s inclination to show mercy (Jonah 4:2)—as this could result in Nineveh, Israel’s enemy, being shown mercy if they repented at his preaching. But Jonah was to learn that when God gives His servants a job to do, He expects them to carry it out.

We might wonder why the inhabitants of the capital of the powerful Assyrian Empire, of all people, would respond to God’s call to repentance at this time. "Events had prepared the people of Nineveh for the prophet’s message. Assyria was led by weak rulers between 782 B.C. and 745 B.C., and was threatened by mountain tribes from the north who had driven their frontiers within a hundred miles of the capital. The danger of destruction was very real in Nineveh in this period" (note on 3:3).

Chapter 4 tells us that Jonah did not want the Ninevites to repent. Assyria had dominated the Israelites not long before in the days of Jehu, even collecting tribute from them. He wanted Assyria to be punished, not sustained and given further chance of destroying Israel. Incredibly, Jonah stated that he wanted to die rather than see God’s mercy on Nineveh! And yet, only a few days before, he had pleaded with God to keep him alive. Such thinking is clearly irrational. Sadly, though, the desire for retribution and revenge is commonplace. Even Christians are not immune. Yet all of us need to learn to be as gracious and compassionate as God is. Our desire should be for those who have done wrong to change, not for them to be punished. Again, we must remember that “mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).

Ironically, Jonah’s message would postpone the fall of Israel...And in actuality, rather than further threatening Israel, Assyria’s repentance spared Israel from conquest for a time, as the lust for violence and conquest was one thing of which Assyria repented (Jonah 3:8). So while God strengthened Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:26-27), He also prevented Assyria from conquering Israel until a later time—and this He accomplished through Jonah’s preaching.

After finally delivering his message, Jonah went away and waited for God to do something. It’s obvious from the context that this was the hot season and the temperature may well have been as high as 110 degrees Fahrenheit in the middle of the day. But God was to teach Jonah (and us) a further lesson about priorities. Jonah was concerned about the plant dying. God showed him that if the plant was important, how much more the people of Nineveh? The reference to 120,000 people “who cannot discern between their right hand and their left” has been the subject of debate. The Bible Reader’s Companion states: "The number either refers to the entire population, or to young children. Since the maximum estimated population at that era was about 175,000, the former is the better interpretation. The saying ‘not tell their right hand from their left’ refers to a lack of moral knowledge, stemming from the fact that Assyria had not been granted special revelation from God" (note on
In that sense, it would also seem that God here views all such human beings as little children in need of being taught.

*Expositor’s* makes a fitting concluding statement: "The declaration of God’s loving care was made, not to Nineveh, but to Jonah (4:11), and so to Israel. Taking the book as a whole, it is a revelation to God’s people of God’s all-sovereign power and care. It had a special relevance to Israel over which the shadow of Assyria was falling, and later to Judah, as it faced destruction at the hands of Babylon" (introductory notes on Jonah).

In *Zephaniah 3:17* we read: “The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”

At the time when modern Israel repents at Christ’s return God will sing for joy over them. He gets very excited and delights in reconciliation like the father did with the prodigal son in *Luke 17.*

In *Zechariah 2:8* we read: “For thus says the L ORD of hosts: ‘He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye.’ God is very protective of His people, Israel. They are special to Him like the apple of one’s eye.

Malachi highlights God’s attitude and feelings towards the Jewish people after the return from Babylon when their respect and reverence toward Him had dropped off, including the conduct of the priests. The Book of Malachi starts off with these words:

"The burden of the word of the L ORD to Israel by Malachi. ‘I have loved you,’ says the L ORD. ‘Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ W as not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ says the L ORD. ‘Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.’ Even though Edom has said, ‘We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places,’ Thus says the L ORD of hosts: ‘They may build, but I will throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom the L ORD will have indignation forever. Your eyes shall see, and you shall say, ‘The L ORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel.’

“A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the L ORD of hosts. To you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despoiled Your name?’ You offer defiled food on My altar. But say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The table of the L ORD is contemptible.’ And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?” says the L ORD. "And you also say, ‘Oh, what a weariness!’ And you sneer at it,” says the L ORD of hosts. ‘And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?’ says the L ORD. ‘But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished—For I am a great King,’ says the L ORD of hosts, ‘And My name is to be feared among the nations”’ *(Malachi 1:1-14).*

The birthright blessings had gone to Jacob’s descendants, not to Esau’s. Later in the millennium will come Esau’s opportunity for blessings and prosperity like Jacob’s descendants who took those blessings for granted and did not acknowledge God gave them those blessings.

God deserves the best not the leftovers which the people and the priests were offering to God. Would we not be very respectful and give our best in attitude and gifts towards a great king or queen like the Queen of England for example? If so, is not God so much greater and more worthy of honour, reverence and the very best of what we have to give?
"And now, O priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not hear, And if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to My name," says the LORD of hosts, 'I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your descendants and spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts; and one will take you away with it...For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi,' says the LORD of hosts. 'Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways but have shown partiality in the law" (Malachi 2:1-9).

The priests were especially guilty of mistreating the people and not speaking the truth of God regarding His values and way of life. Their corruption and misuse of the money and privileges they had caused many to turn away from God. God said, "Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people." The people thought very little of the priests because of the rotten way they treated the people and the corruption they indulged in.

We have seen modern day examples of this with the Catholic Church and its priests being brought into disrepute because of the sexual abuse done by many Catholic priests and the cover-ups that have taken place. We have also seen a contempt of the ministry being stirred up in many lay members in the Church of God due to the doctrinal apostasy and the way many false ministers in the Church of God have mistreated so many members in the church. The ministry is held in greater accountability by God for their actions with the greater authority they have and greater potential to hurt more members with their actions.

"And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. 'For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence,' says the LORD of hosts. 'Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.' You have wearied the LORD with your words; Yet you say, 'In what way have we wearied Him?' In that you say, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,' or, 'Where is the God of justice?'" (Malachi 2:13-17).

God hates divorce and yearns for faithfulness between husbands and wives. Divorce shows a lack of commitment to keeping one's word on the part of one or both parties and often is accompanied by the spirit of hate and violence that comes with broken relationships. God wants strong marriages and families because He is reproducing Himself through us and is seeking godly offspring in our children. Rearing children in the ways of God is so vital because God is reproducing Himself through both us AND our children.

"And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—Because they do not fear Me,' says the LORD of hosts. 'For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob" (Malachi 3:5-6).

Because God is consistent in the love and mercy that He shows us and that He is not temperamental and moody we, therefore, are not consumed. God has great mercy.

God’s attitude towards a lack of faithfulness to tithes and offerings as well as another example of His great overwhelming generosity is spoken about a couple more verses down.
“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it’ (Malachi 3:8-10).

In Malachi 3:16-17 we read: “Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name. They shall be Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”

There is a book of remembrance for those who fear God and love getting together and talking about His truth and way of life. God treasures those who love and obey Him like precious jewels and He will protect them at the time of trouble soon to come upon the whole world.

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Now we come to the life of Jesus Christ. Imagine the emotions the Father and Jesus Christ must have felt at the arrival of this great moment in the plan of God when Jesus would tabernacle with mankind and become flesh. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). There would be great risk as the vulnerability to sin would greatly increase when Christ would become flesh and be subject to the flesh’s natural desires. If He did sin that would leave only the Father left to make this sacrifice but no-one left to resurrect Him.

Often we yearn to be able to have a real interactive conversation with God. God yearns to talk to us as His begotten children in such a direct, interactive way every bit as much. He must have treasured those occasions when He felt it was proper to do so. Moses had an intimate relationship with the God member who became Jesus Christ. Prior to His incarnation when He came to die for our sins, the regular face-to-face friendship with Moses was the only regular face-to-face relationship He had with any human being since the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This time on earth as a physical human being would be a very special time for Him to be able to interact with mankind in such an interactive way. The drawback to all of this was that He would be vulnerable to physical pain and discomfort and give up so much of the powers and abilities that He had as a God being.

The account of Christ’s birth is recorded for us in the book of Luke where we read: ‘Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”’ (Luke 2:8-14).

There was incredible joy of the part of the angels and I’m sure from God the Father at Christ’s birth. He would have been over the moon in the same kind of way any parent is at the birth of their child. Keith Hunt in “The Bible Story” (Volume VII) writes the following about this moment of Christ’s birth:

The God of heaven was not about to let the birth of His Son go completely without notice and praise from at least a few. Oh, it was not going to be announced on worldwide TV or make headlines in every newspaper in every nation of the world. He was not going to send millions of angels flying around the earth to announce the
birth of His Son to all peoples on earth, which He could have done. Yet He would send an angel to let a few people know about this miracle birth...

God the Father took note of the day of His Son’s birth. To Him it was a very blessed day, for the potential that could arise from the life of Jesus was like nothing that the whole universe had ever experienced before. The potential of this one life, this Immanuel life, this God with us in the flesh life, would mean that many millions of others could one day reach the potential that they were created for, to become very sons and daughters in the family of God (p.17).

In his book "Wild at Heart" John Eldredge writes the following about the birth of Christ:

Most of you probably have a Nativity scene that you take out over the holidays and place on a mantel or coffee table. Most of these scenes share a regular cast of characters: shepherds, wise men, maybe a few barnyard animals, Joseph, Mary, and, of course, the baby Jesus. Yes, ours has an angel or two and I imagine yours does as well. But that's about as far as the supernatural gets. What is the overall mood of the scene? Don't they all have a sort of warm, pastoral atmosphere to them, a quiet, intimate feel like the one you get when you sing Silent Night or Away in a Manger? And while that's all very true, it is also very deceiving because it is not a full picture of what's really going on. For that, you have to turn to Revelation 12:

"A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter...And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil or, Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him" (verses 1-5, 7-9).

As Philip Yancey says, I have never seen this version of the story on a Christmas card. Yet it is the truer story, the rest of the picture of what was going on that fateful night. Yancey calls the birth of Christ the Great Invasion, "a daring raid by the ruler of the forces of good into the universe's seat of evil." Spiritually speaking, this is no silent night. It is D-Day. "It is almost beyond my comprehension too, and yet I accept that this notion is the key to understanding Christmas and is, in fact, the touchstone of my faith. As a Christian I believe that we live in parallel worlds. One world consists of hills and lakes and barns and politicians and shepherds watching their flocks by night. The other consists of angels and sinister forces" and the whole spiritual realm. The child is born, the woman escapes and the story continues like this:

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring-those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 12:17).

Behind the world and the flesh is an even more deadly enemy...one we rarely speak of and are even much less ready to resist. Yet this is where we live now--on the front
lines of a fierce spiritual war that is to blame for most of the casualties you see around you and most of the assault against you (p.153-155).

What would it have been like to hold Jesus as a baby? What would it have been like to have a baby in your arms and know that this was the same being who created all mankind and the whole universe and know that He has come to live from a baby to boy to a man and then die to pay for your sins and the sins of all humanity? This privilege God, in His kindness, gave as a special favour to a righteous man named Simeon who was present at Christ’s circumcision.

Joseph and Mary had entered the Temple enclosure to perform the ceremonial rites and sacrifices as ordained in the laws of Moses. Unknown to them there was also another man within the Temple grounds by the name of Simeon. He was a very devoutly religious man, righteously following the ways of the Lord God, and was looking for the comfort and salvation of Israel that God had promised in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Holy Spirit had been upon Simeon for a long time. In fact so close to God was he and so dedicated to serving Him that the Holy Spirit of the Lord had already revealed to him that he was not going to die until he had seen with his eyes the very man child that was the Son of God, the Lord's Christ or Messiah, the Anointed One (Luke 2:25-27).

Simeon saw Joseph and Mary with the little babe Jesus and through the revelation of the Holy Spirit guiding him, he knew immediately that this baby was the Lord’s Anointed One, the Messiah. His heart started to pound inside his chest, great joy and excitement overwhelmed his mind, walking over to Joseph he politely asked if he could hold the baby in his arms, and Joseph replied that he could.

Simeon, taking the baby Jesus in his arms, and looking up to heaven with praise, said, "Lord, now I am ready to die in peace. You have fulfilled your promise towards me. I have seen the Savior that you have brought into this world for salvation to all people. He is the light to the nations, and is the glory of your people Israel” (The Bible Story, Volume VII, p.19)

Jesus’ Baptism

Before He began His ministry Jesus went to John the Baptist to be baptized. "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'” (Matthew 3:16-17).

Here is one of only three occasions where human beings have audibly heard God the Father speak. He said the same words in the vision of the transfiguration which Peter, James and John saw. The two most important things the Father wanted to convey was just how much He loved His son, Jesus Christ, and how much He wanted people to hear and obey the words He had to say.

The Great Temptation

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry (Matthew 4:1-2). Now that’s an understatement if I ever heard one.
But at the end of those forty days, when Jesus was really physically weak and so very hungry, Satan himself, personally, came to Jesus to tempt Him to do wrong, to sin, and to sign up for his team against the God in heaven.

The Devil with sarcasm in his voice, said to Jesus, "Now IF you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread."

Actually, the Devil knew very well that Jesus was the Son of God, so it was with a sarcastic voice he said those words, trying to needle Jesus into getting upset at his seeming doubt that He really was God’s Son.

Satan hoped Jesus would slip up and angrily abuse His power and authority, and do exactly as the Devil wanted Him to do - make bread to eat, from stones. If He had, it would have all been from the wrong motive under this seductive temptation from the Devil.

Jesus did not fall for this trick from Satan. He knew His Bible, and replied to the Devil by quoting it. He said, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

Satan then took Jesus to Jerusalem and up onto the top of the Temple. As He looked out over the land before Him, Satan once more and said to Him, "IF you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge over you' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, less you strike your foot against a stone.'"

Not only was the Devil still being sarcastic and acting by trying to put doubt into the mind of Jesus by saying, "If you be the Son of God" but he was now even quoting Scripture to tempt Jesus to abuse and play with His power and also the Father’s will that there should be no harm or death to His Son before the time appointed.

Jesus knew that no Scripture stood as an island unto itself, but must always be understood in the light of all other Scriptures written through the inspiration of God. So, Jesus, knowing all the other Scriptures, was able to answer the Devil by saying, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

It is very true that God can protect us from harm such as falling from a high place, or if in a car accident, but because we know that God can send angels to protect us from physical harm, does not mean we deliberately jump from a ten story building, or stand in front of an oncoming train, to say to God that we want Him to prove He will protect us.

Satan then took Jesus to the top of one of the high mountains around Jerusalem. He could see far off into the distance. His mind knew many kingdoms of different nations and empires were out there in the world, including the great Roman Empire, that ruled much of the known world at that time.

"Ah, see all these mighty kingdoms," said the Devil to Jesus, "Do you see in your mind all the glory they have. Well, if you will come on my side, worship me, and do my will, I will give you control of all the world. You can in this physical life be the greatest world ruler this earth has ever seen."

Now, at this temptation, Jesus got righteously angry with Satan. "Get out of here, be gone, Satan," was Jesus' reply to him. "For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord"
your God, and Him only shall you serve' " (Matthew 4:3-11) (The Bible Story, Volume VII, p.36).

Can you imagine the pain and emotions He felt going through such horrendous hunger and self-denial? This was one of the two occasions in His life when He would be called on to go through excruciating physical pain to help Him to empathize what many of us go through in our lives. Satan tempted him in ALL points (Hebrew 4:15) from vanity and anger to, no doubt, sexual temptation. Satan gave it his best shot to cause Him to sin at His weakest. Satan in his last temptation offered Him the chance to have all the power back and bypass the need for the pain of the cross later on yet He was totally convicted that only God’s way was best and resisted even when racked with incredible pain.

Water Turned to Wine

Jesus first public miracle is recorded for us in John 3 where we read the account of when He turned water into wine. Keith Hunt in “The Bible Story” (Volume VII) writes the following about this event:

Jesus Himself was not intending to do a public miracle, or make some kind of a big show, at this wedding. He answered His mother by saying, "O woman, this does not concern you and me. My time has not yet come.” Meaning He did not yet want to go public with His miracle working power.

But, His mother (as mothers often have an inner sense for things) knew He would supply the needed wine. And so she told the servants to do whatever Jesus instructed them to do.

There were six stone water-pots in the area, used for the Jewish ceremonial purposes, and held about twenty to thirty gallons each. Jesus told the servants, "Fill those jars with water." And when they had been filled to the brim, He told them to dip some out and take it to the master of the wedding feast. And the servants did exactly as Jesus told them to do.

When the master of the wedding feast tasted the water (which had been made into wine), not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over saying to him, "Usually a host serves the best wine first, then when everyone is full and has enjoyed the best wine, he brings out the less expensive wines. But you have kept the best until now!"

Jesus not only did an instant water into wine miracle, but "aged" it, as it is called in the wine making trade. The very best wine must age for a long period of time. Some wines that have been bottled for a hundred or so years, are classified as the best, and are expensive to buy (The Bible Story, Volume VII, p.39).

Jesus we see here and in other passages was a very sociable man who mingled widely with the people. His mother’s reaction gives the impression that He had performed miracles before. Why would she call on Him to do something about the wine situation if she wasn’t already aware that He was able to perform miracles? There may well have been "private" miracles known only to His family that He had previously performed.

Jesus’ Missing Years

This opens up the question of His human father’s death. Why didn’t Jesus use His healing power to heal His human father at the time that he was dying? Perhaps Jesus was out of the country as has been suspected by many people. There is no Biblical record of Jesus’ life between the ages of 12 and 30.
Stephen Collins in his book "The Lost Ten Tribes of Israel...Found!" writes the following about the 18 missing years of Jesus' life:

If He had been living in Judea or Galilee, it would have been impossible to hide such a precocious youth who had been worshipped by foreign nobility as a child, and who had awed the Temple's rulers with his brilliance at age twelve. Did the spiritual power that was manifesting itself in Jesus at age twelve go dormant for eighteen years? Did Jesus "quench the spirit" at age twelve so he could live as an obscure Galilean carpenter for eighteen years? That is highly unlikely...

The account of Matthew 13:54-56 indicates that after this eighteen year period, Jesus was scarcely remembered in his own home town. Whereas, at age twelve, Jesus is amazing the teachers in the Jerusalem Temple with his wisdom, the common folk in his home town synagogue are asking themselves eighteen years later (after hearing Jesus speak): "Where did this man (Jesus) get this wisdom?" If the uncommon wisdom of Jesus had been present in Nazareth for those eighteen years, such a question would have been ludicrous.

Note also verses 55-56 where the listeners ask: "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us?" This indicates that the members of his home town synagogue were struggling to identify or remember who Jesus was. The fact that they easily named all his immediate family members, and said "are they not all with us?" indicates that Jesus had not been "with them" as were his other family members.

Their quizzical response to Jesus indicates that while Jesus had been gone from Nazareth for a long time, his immediate family members had remained there in the community. Obviously, if Jesus had been a hard-working carpenter in Nazareth all his life, the local citizenry would have easily recognised him. Yet they spoke as having never previously witnessed either his wisdom or power!...

Ordinarily, with the death of a father, the oldest son (even a young one like Jesus) would have been compelled to begin working for a living to support the family. However, since Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy relative (who could guarantee the economic health of the family), Jesus was free to pursue his real calling in life. Also, the Parthian Magi had lavished gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh upon Jesus when they had visited him shortly after his birth. This large sum of wealth would have been held "in trust" for him by either his parents or Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus could have tapped that wealth to provide for his family's needs without having to work as a carpenter [The gospel accounts appear to indicate that Jesus was financially independent during His ministry].

In The Traditions of Glastonbury, E. Raymond Capt cites evidence that Joseph of Arimathea was an international merchant involved with the tin trade in the British Isles. Earlier chapters of this book documented that the British Isles were Israelite regions since at least the reign of Solomon. Also, chapter four presented evidence that large bodies of the tribes of Simeon and Dan entered Briton and Ireland around 721 B.C. when ancient Israel fell to Assyria, adding more Israelites to the population base of the British Isles. It is hardly surprising that Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the tribe of Judah, would be trading with people descended from the other tribes of Israel...
Many traditions assert that Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus were not only present in Britain, but had homes in the area of Glastonbury, England. Supporting these traditions, Capt cites evidence that Glastonbury bore two titles from ancient times - "Secretum Domini" and "Domus Dei" (Latin for "The Secret of the Lord," and "The House of God")...

Capt also lists a fifteenth century document that Joseph of Arimathea converted King Arviragus of first century A.D. Britain to the Christian religion, and that this early king in Britain gave Joseph and his party twelve portions of tax-free land in the area of Glastonbury. This tax-free land in Glastonbury is confirmed in the Domesday Book of early English history under the title "Domus Dei"...

Other ancient legends assert that Jesus travelled as far east as India and Nepal. There is a biblical basis for legends that Jesus could have travelled both in the British Isles, and as far into Asia as India. In Matthew 15:24, Jesus said: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel."

The House of Israel refers to the ten tribes of Israel who have been identified...as including the early Britons, the Sacae/Saka Scythians and the Parthians in Asia. Since the area of Parthian/Saka dominance extended as far as India, groups of the ten tribes of Israel could be found that far into Asia. Since Jesus said he was "sent" to those ten tribes, it is logical that he travelled to where the various tribes of the House of Israel lived in the first century A.D. Since the British Isles and even portions of India (at the eastern edge of Parthia's empire) were then inhabited by the tribes of Israel, Jesus' presence among these people would be a fulfillment of that scripture (p.280-285).

**Jesus in Samaria**

In John 4 we read of Jesus passing through Samaria and when He is in Samaria He speaks to a Samaritan woman at a well. Keith Hunt in "The Bible Story" (Volume VII) writes the following about this event:

"Well lady," Jesus replied, "I can tell you this. The hour is coming when you will not worship the Father either on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. The hour is coming and even now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for that is the kind of people the Father is looking for to worship Him. God is spirit not flesh and blood, and so those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth."

Jesus was here referring to the time that was to come when the armies of Rome under Titus would invade Palestine in 70 A.D., destroy Jerusalem and other places and scatter the Jews, so no organized worship of God in some central location would take place anywhere in that land. Then also Jesus was making a lesson that certain physical things in the worship of God really meant nothing to the Father unless the heart was right with Him. Outward ceremony even in a place that God could approve of was useless if the inner heart was not acceptable to Him (The Bible Story, Volume VII, p.51).

**The Sermon on the Mount**

In Matthew 5 to 7 Christ gave His famous Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is foundational to understanding the New Testament just as the laws and statutes God gave Israel are to understanding the Old Testament and the rest of the Bible for that matter. Jesus' teachings on the
Sermon on the Mount give us a deeper insight into the mind and incredible wisdom of God that often is a lot different to how we might act naturally.

While the Ten Commandments and the other laws and statutes focus mainly on the letter of the law, the Sermon on the Mount covers the spirit and intent behind the laws God gave to Israel when they came out of Egypt. Christ magnified and filled the law to the full (Matthew 5:17) by the incredible way in which He expounded on the spirit and intent behind the law and statutes that God had already given to Israel. The Sermon on the Mount is indeed the Christian constitution. It teaches what basic Christianity is all about in a sermon unparalleled since the time that Christ walked the earth. In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ laid out the very essence of Christianity.

At the beginning of it He explained seven distinct character traits that produce true joy that persists, even in the midst of persecution, outward pressure and turmoil. These traits are often called the beatitudes or beautiful attitudes (Matthew 5:3-9).

The starting point for true happiness is to realize that none of us can meet our own spiritual needs and that we are poor in righteousness without the help of Almighty God. We should be profoundly aware of our deep need for a Saviour and God's righteousness (Matthew 5:3).

Christ's promise to those who mourn for what sin has done in their life and the way it affects others is one of comfort. Those who have come to truly hate sin and who are deeply grieved by it are the heirs of a Kingdom that will be built upon righteousness (Matthew 5:4).

Christ emphasised that those who will rule in His kingdom must be prepared to administer a government vastly different from any they had ever known. Christ taught them that as rulers they were to exemplify an attitude of humble service rather than one of domineering vanity (Matthew 5:5).

Christ went on to emphasize how important the qualities of mercy to others (Matthew 5:7), sincerity in living God's way from right motives (Matthew 5:8) and striving to live peacefully with others (Matthew 5:9) were to our quality of life now and being a part of God's kingdom later on.

On the point of living with a sincere and pure heart, Christ likened some of the religious leaders of His day to actors. For many of the Pharisees were simply playing a part. They 'wore a mask' that appeared to be very religious and holy. They followed countless rules and rituals. But behind this disguise, their inner lives weren't permeated with genuineness and purity of motive as Christ expected of His disciples (Matthew 5:20). The Pharisees were so strict in keeping so many rules and rituals but they did them, not out of a pure heart motivated by love for others, but to get attention from being seen to be righteous.

After discussing these seven character traits He also pronounces a blessing on those who are persecuted and ridiculed because they are living God's way of life (Matthew 5:11-12). They develop more depth of character through such trials which will help them later in life as well as having the promise of God's kingdom to come.

He then uses two analogies to show that we are to be good examples of living God's way of life in this spiritually darkened world (Matthew 5:13-16). We are likened to salt that adds flavour and that was used to preserve meat and lights that should shine through doing good works.

Christ said then that He did not come to destroy the law but to fulfil. Fulfil in this case means live by it or to bring it to the full (Matthew 5:17-19). The written law, opposed to the faulty Jewish oral law, is permanent. Not only did He teach that we should keep the letter of the law but that we also should live by the spirit or intent of the law.
To give a practical illustration of the principles He was teaching, Christ chose the sixth commandment, ‘You shall not murder’ (Exodus 20:13), and showed how much more it meant than what they then understood. Jesus explained that it was not just the physical act of murder that would result in God’s judgment, but unjustified anger as well (Matthew 5:22). Expressions of contempt are the outgrowth of feelings of anger and hostility. They reflect the spirit of murder. It’s not enough simply to refrain from intentionally killing someone. Christ told His disciples to get rid of the very attitudes that could motivate such an act...

After discussing the spirit of murder, Christ proceeded to discuss another of the Ten Commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery’ (Matthew 5:27). He emphasised again that avoidance of the physical act wasn’t sufficient. God desires much more of those who would inherit His Kingdom. As Christ went on to explain, lustful thoughts violate the spirit of the seventh commandment, even if there are no physical acts accompanying them...

Another major area in which the Pharisees totally missed the point of what God was really after concerns oaths. In Matthew 23:16-22, it’s made clear that they spent a lot of time debating which oaths were more valid than others. Christ showed them just how futile this was by emphasising that God’s real desire and intent was for people to simply tell the truth on all occasions. The idea that truth was obligatory under certain conditions and not under others is alien to the very character and nature of our God...Christ emphasised to His followers that rather than take any oaths whatsoever, they should simply let their yes be yes and their no be no (Matthew 5:37) (World Ahead, Nov-Dec 1998, p.16-17, 28).

In Matthew 5:43-45 Christ said: ”You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

The law never said to hate your enemy. They were to show love to strangers or foreigners (Leviticus 19:33-34). The part about hating your enemy was a part of Jewish oral law that was added. Sometimes you can turn an enemy into a friend by showing love and kindness to them, focusing on and praising their good qualities and praying for them. Even if they still mistreat you, you will bear it much better if you are positive towards them than if you are hateful and vengeful to them.

“For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:46-48).

Here is a real litmus test for a christian. Do we only love those who love us? Is our love merely limited to our own small circle of friends? Is it limited to giving only when it is convenient to us? If it is, then Christ quite bluntly says here that our conversion really is not much better than that of the pagans and sinners of the world. If we have true outgoing love we’ll extend ourself beyond our own personal comfort zone and give to those we wouldn’t naturally associate with, as well as those who are closest to us.

In Matthew 6:1 Christ said: “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.” We are not to do good works to be seen of men or to draw attention to ourselves so others will praise us. We are to do good because we believe in helping others.
Christ told them not to speak vain repetitive prayers but to talk to God from the heart with meaning. He cares for us and He wants us to put our hearts and feelings into our prayers. He then went on to give a model prayer or a pattern for us to work from when we talk to God and seek His help with our needs and those of others (Matthew 6:9-13).

It starts off with “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name”. We are coming before the great King of the Universe to whom all praise is due but not only that, He is also our Father. We are to pray for God’s kingdom and that He will give us our daily needs which implies we should pray on a daily basis. Notice to that it’s not my needs but OUR needs. We should care for and pray for other people’s needs as well. We are also to daily seek forgiveness for our regular sins and those of others and we are to pray for spiritual strength for ourselves and others to handle the trials that life throws at us at times.

In Matthew 6:22-23 Christ says: “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.” The word used here for eye here means one’s attitude. We need a good heart and attitude that wants to do right. It doesn’t matter what “good works” someone might do, if they are motivated by a selfish attitude (they give to get) then they will not be developing God’s righteousness at all.

The second half of Matthew 6 deals with the matter of our priorities in life. We live in a materialistic world where people are trying to get more physical things and make lots of money. Pursuing wealth only becomes a problem when we put it ahead of other more important things such as caring for one’s family and living God’s way of life. Christ tells us to focus on laying up treasures in heaven (building God’s character) rather than treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19-21). He also tells us that you can’t serve two masters at the same time such as God and money (Matthew 6:24).

Many people have to endure the weekly struggle of making just enough money to make ends meet. This can be a cause of great worry and anxiety for people. God tells us not to worry and that we have His promise that He will always provide for our needs (not always our wants though) if we seek Him and His righteousness FIRST ahead of everything else. He has these encouraging words to help build our faith in His sure promise to always provide for our needs:

> Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?...Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:25-33) (World Ahead, May-June 1999, p.22).

When we’re insecure we lack faith and we worry. John Haggai in his book “How to Win Over Worry” makes the following comments about worry:

> Worry is a sin. It is always a sin for two reasons. Worry is distrust in the truthfulness of God and worry is detrimental to the temple of God [our bodies]...When you worry you accuse God of falsehood! (p.29)

God says “I will work out everything for the best in the end.” Worry says, “You’re lying God”.

God says, “Cast all your cares on me for I do care very much for you (put your own name in here).” Worry says, "You're lying God".
God says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Worry says, "You're lying God."

God says, "Don't worry about anything. I will provide you with all your needs. I will give you your hearts desires also if you will seek me. Look at all the birds. They don't sow or reap yet I provide for them. Look at all the lilies of the field. They don't toil or spin yet I array them in magnificence. How much more do I love you and want to give you good things with all my heart? Why do you lack faith? You, (insert your name), are so precious to me and I want to give you your heart's desires if you seek and love me. So don't worry."

In Matthew 7 Jesus [exhorts] His disciples not to be judgmental and condemning in dealing with people. We aren't to have a negative, critical, "holier-than-thou" attitude towards others. The one who takes it upon himself to stand in judgment of the hearts of others is usurping the place of God, the Judge of all mankind. Christ says that such a person will be called into account by the very One whose role he usurps - and will be judged by Him! As He went on to explain in verses 3 through 5, before we can take the 'speck' out of someone else's eye, we must first get rid of the 'log' in our own eye. How can we help others by pointing out some small mistake or fault when we are a thousand times more guilty - and are thus blaring forth our hypocrisy? Rather than pointing the finger at everyone else, we need to go to God and ask Him to reveal to us our own faults - so that we can change. Then we can effectively serve others, helping them to overcome their weaknesses.

We must come to see that God is very real and really does answer prayer. Christ told His disciples to ask, seek and knock (Matthew 7:7) - and that God would be there to provide. Even human fathers, with all of their natural human selfishness, would never dream of giving their own children something hurtful when they were hungry and had asked for food (v. 9-10). Christ then emphasized how much more willing our Heavenly Father is to give good gifts to His children when they ask (v. 11). For God's way is a way of give - of love and outflowing concern (World Ahead, May-June 1999, p.22).

In Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount He then says in Luke 6:38: "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." You give and God gives to you. Notice how much he gives to you - a "GOOD MEASURE". In other words He's not stingy. How good is this good measure? Notice - "PRESSED DOWN AND SHAKEN". Ever open up a box of cereal and you find it's only half full because when you press it down and shake it and open it half of it isn't there. Well God does more than that. When God gives you a blessing He presses it down, then shakes it then there's some area left you see. Then, what does He do? He fills it up again so that it's "RUNNING OVER". The point is here is that God gives generously but He only gives to those who give to Him and to others.

God's way must become our way. 'So in everything,' Jesus said, 'do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets' (v.12 NIV). Known as the Golden Rule this familiar statement helps to summarize all that Jesus had been teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Here He showed the true direction to which all of the instructions of the Old Testament pointed. Interestingly, this principle was taught in its negative form by the rabbis of Christ's day. Quoting a statement by Rabbi Hillel, dating from about A.D. 20, the Talmud states, 'What is hateful to you, do not to anyone else' (b Shabbath 31a). By stating it in the positive form as He did, however, Jesus included sins of omission as well as commission (World Ahead, May-June 1999, p.22-23).
In the conclusion to His Sermon on the Mount, Christ drew a series of contrasts by describing two paths, two trees and two houses that teach us that we must learn to make right choices while rejecting wrong ones.

The pathway that leads to eternal life is depicted by Jesus as a narrow way traversed by comparatively few. It is contrasted with the wide and popular pathway where the many are to be found. Those who follow in the footsteps of the Messiah will find that the path is often difficult and fraught with peril (Matthew 7:13-14). As the Apostle Paul explained, the pathway that leads into the entrance of the Kingdom passes through many hardships (Acts 14:22). It is the pathway of righteousness, which is illuminated by the lamp of God's Word (Psalm 119:105).

Next, Jesus drew a contrast between two trees. One yielded good fruit and the other yielded bad. The fruit produced testifies to the kind of tree which produced it. Christ told His listeners that they would encounter false prophets but that they could discern the true from the false on the basis of the fruit they produced (Matthew 7:15-20). These false prophets would, of course, claim to be true ones - but the evidence of their life and teaching would belie their claims...

The last of the contrasts drawn in the Sermon on the Mount is that between two houses. One was built on solid rock and the other was built on sand. [The one built on the sand] seemed to stand for a while but when storms came one house remained standing and the other collapsed - “and great was its fall” (v. 24-27). Nothing can be more substantial than the foundation upon which it is built. Jesus likened those who listened to His words and then proceeded to put them into practice in their lives to the man who built his house upon the rock - a solid, sure foundation.

You see, it’s not enough to merely hear the Truth, to know it academically or even to acknowledge it and to pay lip service to it. The Truth of God is something that must be practiced in our everyday lives. Jesus the Messiah came with a powerful message that directs His followers to a radical transformation of their own lives - including their priorities and even their innermost thoughts, attitudes and motives (World Ahead, May-June 1999, p.23).

Jesus’ Heals the Leper

In Matthew 8 we read: “When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately his leprosy was cleansed” (verses 1-3).

This is one of the first of Jesus’ many, many healings that are recorded in the Gospels. In many of the other healing accounts the healing is usually proceeded by the comment that Jesus had compassion on this person and then healed them. Jesus was touched and moved by both the pain and frustration their sickness or injury had brought upon the person and also with the faith and yearning they showed to be healed of their condition. There was often a lot of touching involved in these miracles to convey his personal love and affection for people.

In this account of the leper being healed the Visual Bible video series on Matthew presents a very moving dramatisation of this healing extrapolating on how Jesus and the leper may well have reacted after the healing. In the video series on Matthew the leper is beaming with joy when he sees that he is completely healed of his leprosy. With Jesus’ arms outstretched he welcomes the leper to embrace...
him, who not only does so but jumps into his arms as they fall on the ground both beaming with joy at the healing.

The actor who plays Jesus in this video series presents one of the most authentic performances of what Jesus would have been like. Unlike the expressionless and stoic portrayal of Jesus that is presented in the movie "King of Kings" this actor shows the kind of tremendous warmth and feeling that Jesus would have had when He was on earth.

We read in **Mark 2:1**: "And when He was come to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was AT HOME." While Christ did travel around a fair bit during His ministry he also had a home and lived amongst the people in Capernaum along the beautiful shoreline of Lake Galilee. People could come to Him and see how He lived in a typical home environment. It's interesting that He made His home on the shore of Lake Galilee rather than His original home town of nearby Nazareth. Like many people, Jesus enjoyed and chose to live near the sea when He built His home.

**Jesus on the Sabbath**

"Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, 'Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?' But He said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?' And He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath'" (Mark 2:23-28).

The Pharisees in their self-righteous zeal had invented so many of their extra do's and don'ts with the Sabbath that they went to extremes in how they thought it should be kept. We see here in the example of David that Jesus quoted that God is not inflexible with the sabbath and ceremonial laws of God like the Pharisees were when genuine human need was at stake.

What needs to be kept in mind with the original story of David eating the old showbread that was reserved for the priests was that God's answer would have been inquired of before the priest gave them the showbread. David was very much in the habit of always seeking God's will through the High Priest, as was the High Priest through the Urim and Thummim. In fact, inquiring God's will, was the very reason given for His visit to the High Priest in the next chapter (1 Samuel 22:10).

**Sabbath Healings**

"And He [Jesus] entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Step forward.' Then He said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' But they kept silent. And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him" (Mark 3:1-6).

Christ here was grieved at the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts that they would begrudge the complete healing of someone with a withered hand because it conflicted with their list of do's and don'ts about what could be done on the Sabbath. They allowed their legalism to make them angry when they should have rejoiced in this wonderful, incredible healing.

"Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But
when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, ‘Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.’ And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day.’ The Lord then answered him and said, ‘Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?’ And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him” (Luke 13:10-17).

Jesus always had the perfect comeback for the hard-hearted Pharisees whenever they got angry with Him for healing on the Sabbath. He was angry and grieved with them that they were more focused on their own picky rules than in caring for this poor woman who suffered for years with her crooked spine. He couldn't believe how heartless they were to be nit-picky and self-righteous about their invented rules to not show any compassion for the woman's condition and joy in her healing.

Samuele Bacchiocchi makes these comments on the many sabbath healings that Christ did during His ministry:

"In His subsequent ministry, Christ revealed the nature of His redemptive mission especially through His Sabbath healing and teaching ministry. Seven Sabbath Healing episodes and ensuing controversies are reported in the Gospels (Matthew 12:1-8; 9; 14; Mark 1:21-28; 2:23-28; 3:1-6; Luke 4:36-39; 13:1-2; John 5:1-18; 21:21-24; 9:1-41). It is noteworthy that in all cases Christ intentionally acted against prevailing tradition by healing on the Sabbath chronically sick persons. By offering on the Sabbath physical and spiritual liberation to souls 'whom Satan bound' (Luke 13:16), the Savior made the day a time to celebrate and to experience the blessings of His redemptive ministry" (The Good News of the Sabbath for Today).

**Jesus Heals the Centurion’s Servant**

In Matthew 8:5-13 we read of the account of the Roman centurion who came to Jesus and compassionately asked for his servant to be healed:

"Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.' And Jesus said to him, 'I will come and heal him.' The centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.' When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!...Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.’ And his servant was healed that same hour".

Jesus was very moved by the faith of this Roman centurion and publicly praised him saying that He had not seen this kind of faith in Israel. He was very surprised to find it in a Roman centurion, who was a Roman commanding 100 soldiers. He marvelled in his compassion (that a Gentile soldier in high authority would go out of his way to have his servant healed), his faith (that he understood Jesus' authority over sickness and knew only a command from afar would suffice for him to be healed) and he would have marvelled in his humility and respect (that a Gentile soldier in high authority would not feel worthy for Jesus to enter his house).
Jesus eats with the Tax Collectors and Sinners

In Matthew 9:10-13 we read: “Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ When Jesus heard that, He said to them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

Here Christ practices what Paul wrote about in Romans 12:16: “Be friendly with everyone. Don’t be proud and feel that you are smarter than others. Make friends with ordinary people” (Contemporary English Version). Jesus was happy to mingle with ordinary everyday people as showed care and concern and a willingness to associate with those that society tends to reject.

Jesus became more and more displeased with callous, hypocritical nature of the Pharisees as His ministry continued. He explained to them that if you want to help those in most need in our society you have to be willing to spend time with them. You can’t hope to only help them from afar. He then quoted Hosea 6:6 to them - “I desire mercy not sacrifice.” He wanted them to get the point that ritual was not the main thing that God really wanted. God wants us to be merciful and do our best to help others less fortunate than we are.

Jesus’ Concern for the Multitudes

“Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:35-37).

Again we see Jesus’ deep compassion for the people. He healed not just a few but every sickness and disease among them. He was moved with compassion sensing by the way they lived their lives and desperately reached out for a better one that they were like lost sheep needing the truth of His coming kingdom and the knowledge of His way of life to live a happier life. His response to the disciples was to ask God to send more labourers for the great spiritual harvest.

In Matthew 10:29-30 we read: “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

Jesus here was saying that God knows us very intimately, even better than we know ourselves. He is fully aware of the troubles and problems that we go through and He yearns to have a relationship with us and help us where He can within His great plan. He really is intensely interested in our lives and even with the little things we might not think to bother Him by.

In Matthew 11:28-29 we read: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

He yearns to make things easier for us where we don’t have to suffer the consequences of sin but not to the point where we don’t deal with the sins which are the cause of those painful effects. There are two major pains in life – the pain of discipline and the pain of regret. Jesus wants us to be willing to take on the lighter pain of disciplining ourselves to live His way so we don’t have to deal with the much greater pain of regret and the consequences of our sins. God’s way is much easier in the long run. Jesus wants us to learn from Him and says that He is gentle and humble.
Jesus Joy in His Spiritual Babes

“Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’ And He said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.’ In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, ‘I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight...Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it”’ (Luke 7:17-24).

Here Jesus showed great joy that these spiritual “babes” had the wonderful opportunity to share in the incredible understanding of God’s truth and the understanding of God’s kingdom and way of life. He rejoiced in the great wisdom and plan of God to confound the wise later on by using the “fools” of this world to do His Work that no flesh should glory and take the credit for the great plan God is working out here through mankind.

Jesus on Forgiveness

A beautiful story that shows how incredible a blessing the forgiveness of our sins is can be found in Luke 7 where we read:

“Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, ‘This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.’ And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ So he said, ‘Teacher, say it.’

‘There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?’ Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have rightly judged.’ Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.’ Then He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Then He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace”’ (verses 36-50).

This woman showed incredibly moving love for Jesus as God's representative knowing just how merciful God had been to her to forgive her of the terrible sins that she had committed. She was completely overwhelmed by the mercy which she comprehended God had extended to her unlike Simon who didn't see the depth of his own sinful nature. Jesus intentionally went out of His way to show praise and appreciation for the reverent and appreciative attitude of the woman who wiped His feet with her tears. He would have been quite moved by the depth of her reverence.
“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven’” (Matthew 18:21-22).

Simon Peter had come to Christ and asked Him if he should be willing to forgive his brother as many as seven times! Imagine his surprise when Christ told him that the number of times he must forgive his brother was ‘not seven, but seventy times seven.’ Peter's first thought may have been, ‘But I couldn't keep track of that many times!' And that, of course, is the whole point. We are not to be ‘keeping score.’ Rather, we must be ready to extend mercy and compassion continually. After all, we need God to extend it to us continually” (World Ahead, Sept-Oct 1998, p.17).

**Jesus Speaks in Parables and Stories**

In Matthew 13 Jesus gives a number of parables – the parable of the sower, the parable of the wheat and the tares, the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven. Jesus had quite a penchant for speaking in parables and stories throughout the gospel accounts.

God knows the power of a good story. They say that truth is stranger than fiction. God has started His book, the Bible, with some of the most powerful stories ever told. From the poetic elegance of the Creation account to the mighty deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt by the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea God knows how to impress lessons on us with great stories. We can know all the theory in the world about how to live a godly life but great examples of kindness and love help us to much better understand what love is about than any theological explanation (1 Corinthians 10:11).

“The disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand’” (verses 10-13).

Part of the reason that He spoke in parables was to conceal the mysteries of the Kingdom of God to those God was not choosing to call just yet. Without the key to understand them (the explanations he would later tell His disciples) they were confusing and didn't make sense but combined with the explanation of them He passed onto His disciples they enhanced their understanding and help better impress on them certain spiritual lessons. There's nothing quite like a good story to drive home an important lesson. This is what He meant when He said "For whoever has, to him more will be given". In his book "The Man Nobody Knows" Bruce Barton writes:

A parable is a story. He told them stories, stories about people, and let the stories carry His message. He might have adopted very different methods many teachers and would-be leaders do. He might have dealt in generalities, saying: "When you are going about your business, be as kind as you can. Be thoughtful of the other travelers on the highways of life. Take time to look for those who have fared less fortunately; lend them a helping hand whenever you can."

I say He might have uttered such generalities. But if He had, do you suppose that they would ever have been remembered? Would the disciples have recorded them? Would our age ever have heard His name? He was far wiser in the laws and habits of the human mind. Instead of such commonplace phrases, He painted this striking picture: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves." There's your illustration! If you had lived near Jerusalem or Jericho, if you
often had occasion to use that very road, wouldn’t you want to know what happened to that unfortunate traveler?

"They stripped off his raiment," the parable continues, "and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead." Soon a priest came by and seeing the victim said to himself, "That’s a shameful thing. The police ought to do something about these outrages." But he crossed the road carefully and passed by on the other side. A certain respectable Levite also appeared. "His own fault," he sniffed; "ought to be more careful." And he too passed by. Then a third traveler drew near and stopped—and the whole world knows what happened.... Generalities would have been soon forgotten. But the story that had its roots in everyday human experience and need lives and will live forever. The parable of the Good Samaritan condenses the philosophy of Christianity into a half dozen unforgettable paragraphs (p.76-77).

Many Reject Jesus’ Message

When He preached to those from his own region: “Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.’ Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them." (Mark 6:4-5). Was this a case of familiarity breeds contempt? If it was Jesus was still amazed at how little He could help them because of their attitude towards Him and how little stock they placed in the possibility that He might be a prophet who could heal.

In John 6 we read of how Christ pruned His followers down to those who were truly interested in putting what He was teaching into practice. To test the attitude of those who were following Him at the time, Jesus was deliberately provocative in His teaching about Passover and developing the mind and character of Christ. In this age where God is calling His church He is much more interested in quality than quantity of conversion.

In John 6:53 we read: “Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." Dropping down to verse 60 we read: “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, 'This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’ And further down in verse 66, John writes: ‘From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’”.

We see here a separation. Satan had succeeded in sowing the seeds of doubt in those who were half-hearted whether Jesus was worth following anymore. The twelve, on the other hand, had a more positive attitude. They had no doubts that Christ had the words of eternal life and were willing to persist, even when they didn’t fully understand what He was teaching them.

Feeding the Multitudes

In Matthew 14:14-21 we read the one of the stories of Jesus feeding the multitudes: "And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’ And they said to Him, ‘We have here only five loaves and two fish.’ He said, ‘Bring them here to Me.’ Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments
that remained. Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children."

His compassion is shown again in the next chapter when He again feeds the multitudes: "Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, ‘I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way’" (Matthew 15:32).

Jesus had great feeling and compassion for the people and He displayed an important christian quality – that of hospitality. He showed a willingness to be a good host and provide a good meal for them.

In his book "The Man Nobody Knows" Bruce Barton makes the following comments about Jesus as an outdoor man:

On the Sabbath He was in the synagogue because that was where the people were gathered, but by far the greater part of His teaching was done on the shores of His lake, or in the cool recesses of the hills. He walked constantly from village to village; His face was tanned by the sun and wind. Even at night He slept outdoors when He could - turning His back on the hot walls of the city and slipping away into the healthful freshness of the Mount of Olives. He was an energetic outdoor man. The vigorous activities of His days gave His nerves the strength of steel. As much as any nation ever, Americans understand and respect this kind of man (p.29).

**Jesus Walks on Water**

In Matthew 14:22-32 we read the story of Jesus walking on water: "Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.' And Peter answered Him and said, 'Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.' So He said, 'Come.' And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased."

Peter’s spontaneous response to seeing Christ was to prove it by asking Him to bid him come out and join Him walking on the water. He made a few steps out on the water without a problem before thinking that he hadn’t thought his response through very well. "What have I gotten myself into here?" As he noticed the strong wind and started to look down he lacked the faith to continue and started to sink. Jesus then grabbed him and chided him for his lack of faith.

If there wasn’t something Peter could do to bolster his faith Jesus wouldn’t have chided him. Peter should have realized this was but a small thing with God and that God had already backed up his faith with the first few steps. I’m sure there are many times in our lives that God must shake His head a little with us and say "O you of little faith" when there are times when it is well within us to be more trusting of Him.
Jesus and the Gentile Woman

In Matthew 15:21-28 we read of the story of the Gentile woman who asked for her daughter to be healed of a demon-possession:

"Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.' But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, 'Send her away, for she cries out after us.' But He answered and said, 'I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!' But He answered and said, 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.' And she said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.' Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour."

The disciples showed a lack of compassion for this foreign Gentile woman that Jesus appeared to show at first. His apparent indifference to her and his statement "It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs" was a test to her to see if she was respectful and would persist with her request. She responded marvelously by not arguing with Him that His main ministry was not to the Gentiles and asking for just some crumbs of His help. Jesus then commended her for her great faith and granted her request.

Jesus Heals a Blind Man in an Unusual Way

In Mark 8:22-25 we read: "Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, 'I see men like trees, walking.' Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly."

The Bible Believers Commentary has this to say about this miracle, which is the only one recorded that took place in stages: "Every case of healing is different, as is every case of conversion. Some gain remarkable spiritual sight as soon as they are converted. Others see dimly at first, then later enter into full assurance of salvation." Another point we should note when it comes to the many miracles that were performed by God by Jesus, the apostles and through the ministry today when we are healed after anointing is that there is in most cases physical contact. Touch is important as it conveys personal warmth and concern from God for what He bestows.

Jesus Speaks of Building His Church

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:16-17).

We saw earlier that the Levites had no land inheritance and that this shows that God understands the need for checks and balances when you are dealing fallible humans who are given power and authority. There is a similar example of Jesus spreading the balance of power with those who would lead His church in the New Testament era. He did not appoint one apostle and eleven evangelists. He appointed twelve apostles. In fact, there would be several other apostles appointed after His ascension to Heaven.
Short-Term Pain v Long-Term Pain

In Matthew 16:21-24 we read: "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.' Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'"

Here we again see Jesus’ focus on the need to go through short-term pain to achieve long-term good. The short-term pain of the crucifixion would be indescribable agony yet the long-term good it would achieve for the rest of eternity would be even greater. Peter did not see the need for Christ to go through these painful events and said that it could not happen to Him.

Christ recognized the source of this line of thinking of taking the easy way out. It might be easy in the short term but mankind would still be left in its sins and have no eternal life, an intolerable thought for our compassionate Saviour who was willing to lay His life down to save us. Satan had earlier tried in vain to offer Him the chance to rule and bypass the necessity of having to die a painful death with the catch of paying homage to him. Christ was determined to stay the course, as painful as it would be, to save mankind from their sins. He encourages us to also stay the course of bearing the short term pain of discipline and even persecution to obey Him by saying that we must deny the self and take up our cross or burden and to live responsibly.

The Transfiguration of Jesus

In Matthew 17 we read of the vision of the transfiguration of Jesus: "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!' And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, 'Arise, and do not be afraid.' When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead'" (verses 1-9).

Here we see Jesus’ desire to share a little something of the incredible future of the Kingdom of God with His disciples. He wanted them to get caught up in how magnificent the time will be when God will rule all the world and the saints will be resurrected and share the same powerful glory as God. Peter perceived this when he asked to build three tabernacles as he recognized three God beings in this vision of the future.

Here is one of only three occasions where human beings have audibly heard God the Father speak. His message was the same that He spoke at Jesus’ baptism – “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” Two of the most important things the Father wanted to convey was just how much He loved His son, Jesus Christ, and that He wanted people to hear and obey the words He had to say.

More Lessons on Faith and Humility

In Matthew 17:15-21 we read: "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long
shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.’ And Jesus rebuked the
demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came
to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ So Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your
unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain,
Move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind
does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

Here again Christ chides them for their lack of faith. While faith is a fruit that comes from His Holy
Spirit (Gal. 5:22), it is also a choice to believe or not believe. We still have the power of choice to
believe or not believe. Our ability to trust in God in the face of difficult situations is strengthened
through drawing closer to God with prayer and fasting.

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then
Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless
you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.
Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these
little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his
neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea’” (Matthew 18:1-6).

We see here Jesus again emphasizes the importance of humility and not big noting ourselves as so many
do in this world. God really cares for the little people in the church, both little children as well as those
who are lowly lay members in the church who might not be so popular. God really hates it when they are
mistreated and takes note of it. In His time He will give them justice.

**Parable of the Lost Sheep**

In Matthew 18:11-15 Christ spoke the parable of the lost sheep: “For the Son of Man has come to save
that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray,
does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he
should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that
did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones
should perish. Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and
him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.”

God yearns for everyone to be saved and He is not willing that ANY should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He is
not content that He has saved most people. He will go out of His way to help anyone who has lost their
way – so great is His love for each and every one of us. For us, sometimes helping a spiritually lost
sheep means having to gently confront someone about their sins.

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he
hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by
the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it
to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax
collector” (Matthew 18:15-17).

God knows the solution to interpersonal problems is the opposite of being a gossip and spreading
and/or embarrassing someone of their problems by telling as many people as possible. You only bring
in others step by step as is necessary AFTER you’ve gone to them privately and they refuse to respond.

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your
heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13).
Jesus here highlights just generous God the Father really is. Think of how human fathers love their children and multiply that greatly and you get a better idea of God’s great kindness and generosity. There are things that we ask for from God that He doesn’t give us and there are times we do struggle to get by but in hindsight when God blesses us later we will see that those hard times produced something in us much greater than the physical comforts of life – His character of patience as well as a deeper compassion for others who have also suffered through life.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

In Luke 15 Jesus gave the parable of the prodigal son which highlights the compassionate and forgiving nature of our Heavenly Father: “A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”’

“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

“Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ But he was angry and would not go in.

“Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devour’d your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’” (verses 11-32).

God shows tremendous joy and a forgiving attitude when we genuinely turn our lives around and turn to Him. He wants us to have the same attitude and not begrudge any “Johnny-come-lately’s” who leave the church and return later on.

The final verse is part of the lyrics of one of the most moving hymns ever created on the blessing of forgiveness – Amazing Grace. The writer of Amazing Grace was a slave trader in the 1800’s before he turned to striving to live God’s way. The lyrics reveal the moving depth of gratitude he felt that God would be willing to forgive the terrible sins that he had made in his life. He wrote: “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found. Blind but now I see.”

The deeper the sins we have committed quite often the deeper gratitude people have for the gift of forgiveness and the deeper determination that people have to live God’s way and in a sense make up
for the terrible things that they have done in the past. The deeper the pain we go through the deeper the repentance is that comes after it. Just ask Peter after he had betrayed Christ three times.

**Lazarus Raised From the Dead**

In *John 11* we read of the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. After he was told that Lazarus was sick he deliberately delayed going to Bethany until after Lazarus had died and been buried.

“So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.

"Then Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live’” (*John 11:18-25*).

Jesus then proceeded to raise Lazarus from the dead. There are many times when God doesn’t make sense and He seems “four days too late” to answer our prayers yet God has perfect timing as He sees things in our life from a much greater perspective. This resurrection from the dead at this early occasion was completely unexpected to Lazarus’ sister, Martha yet God would use it as a powerful witness of Jesus and that He has power over life and death at any time.

**Jesus Blesses Little Children**

In *Matthew 19:13-14* we read: “Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’”

Here we see another example of Jesus’ willingness to associate with the little people - in this case quite literally. He had a great love for little children and enjoyed embracing and holding them and playing with them. Here was another example of his gentleness with all people.

**The Rich Young Ruler**

As Jesus was once more setting out on His journey towards Jerusalem, a certain very wealthy young ruler ran up to Jesus and kneeling before Him, asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone?" He was obviously wondering if this man knew that He, Jesus, was God in the flesh.

Continuing to answer his question, Jesus said, "You know the commandments, if you would enter or inherit eternal life, keep the commandments, 'Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not bear false witness, do not steal, honor your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "

The rich young man said to him, "All these I have done from my youth, what do I still lack in how I should live?" And Jesus looking upon him with love, said to him, "You lack one thing. If you would be perfect, go and sell what you possess and give it all to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and then come and follow me" [*Mark 10:17-21*]
When the young rich ruler heard this he went away very sorrowfully because he had great possessions, and was physically very wealthy. Jesus turned and looked at His disciples and said to them, "I tell you the truth, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. And again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

The disciples were greatly astonished when they heard Him say these things. And they asked Him, "Who then can enter the Kingdom of God and be saved?" "With men," Jesus replied, "it is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Yes, the natural tendency of the human heart is, if wealthy, to rely and covet, even putting faith into the material money and goods you have, and to not think you need God in your life. Or, as this young rich man found out, making your physical wealth something you cannot give up. Jesus loved this young man for observing the basic letter of the commandments of God from his youth, but He knew there was ONE weakness that he had that would keep him from entering the Kingdom of God. That weakness was that he could not give up his physical wealth, give it to the poor and needy and be a fully dedicated disciple of the Lord.

His wealth had become his "god" and he did not realize it until Jesus put him to the test over it. Sometimes God does put us to the test, not always, but sometimes, especially if we ask Him what we lack in order to inherit eternal life. He may very well tell us in no uncertain terms. Physical wealth is not wrong to have, for many of God's people down through the ages have been blessed with great material riches, such as Job, and Abraham, but their wealth never became their idol or "god" - they would readily have given it all up to be as King David once said, "I'd rather be a door keeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of rich people" (The Bible Story, Volume VII, p.221-222).

Jesus must have also felt very sad that the rich young ruler couldn't let go of his riches and follow Him. It says that Jesus loved him. Jesus could see the great potential in him but He also saw this one Achilles heel of a problem. He put it to the test and, for now, he sadly failed it.

**Jesus' Final Week in Jerusalem**

In Matthew 20:18-19 we read: "Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.'"

Again he spoke of his terrible fate with his disciples who seemed blinded in their understanding of it until it finally happened. He knew full well the awful, painful fate that awaited Him at the end of His ministry. How heavily did this weigh upon his mind as He went up to Jerusalem for the final time?

"Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them.' All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.' So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those
who followed cried out, saying: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!’ (Matthew 21:1-9).

We see here the humility of Jesus riding in to town on a donkey similar to the humble way He came into the world born in a manger. The people were expecting a King who would rise up and free them from the domination of the Roman Empire but Jesus knew the people’s expectations would be dashed at this time as He had not come this time, as an all-conquering King of kings, but as a lowly human to die for our sins.

In Matthew 21:12-13 we read of the second occasion where Christ got angry with the money changers and other merchants in the Temple and went about cleansing the Temple of their profiteering. Keith Hunt in “The New Testament Bible Story (Volume VII)” writes the following about this incident:

“The mindset and character of those selling and exchanging money Jesus knew was far from pure and honorable. They were out to line their own pockets, to rob the people, to cheat them, to simply do a business and take advantage of the pure hearts of the people coming to worship God at the Temple and fulfill the laws of God as given to Israel through Moses...

"Jesus could see that those merchants were making the very House of God into something it was never intended to become - a merchant market place for profit. His anger grew more and more as He saw what was going on. The Bible says, ‘Be angry, but sin not.’ There is a time to become righteously angry. Many passages show that God can and does get righteously angry at times. Yet, it is always righteous anger, without any sin. There are times we must get very upset at sin and wrong doing. This was one of those times for Jesus.

"He made a long whip from string cords that came from boxes and packages that were sent to those merchants or that were used to tie up the animals they were selling. Jesus whirling the whip around His head, much like an American cowboy whirs his lariat over his head when roping a steer, drove the animals out of the temple, and threw over the tables of the money-exchangers, the coins rolling all over the place.

"As He was doing all this, He raised His voice and exclaimed to those thieving and wrong minded merchants, ‘Take these things away! You shall not make my Father's house into a house of merchandise and business trade.’ The disciples of Jesus, many of them knowing much of what was written in the word of God, remembered the verse where it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house will consume me’ (Psalm 69:9)."

In Matthew 21:16 we read: "When the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were indignant and said to Him, ‘Do You hear what these are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise’?

Jesus here rejoiced at the joy and faith expressed by the little children. He recognized how the scriptures had said how sweet the simple praises of little children can be.

In Matthew 22:18-22 we read: "But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, ‘Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.’ So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’ They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left Him and went their way."
The Pharisees were always trying to trick him and get Him to say something that they could convict Him with or look bad in front of the people. They thought they had the perfect test here with the question of whether it was right to pay taxes. Say yes and the people would turn from Him. Say no and they could convict him of rebelling against the government. He dealt with each and every test in an ingenious way. His answer “Render to Caesar what belongs to Him and to God what belongs to Him” was profound yet uncompromising with the truth.

In Matthew 23 Christ really laid it on the line and let the Pharisees have it: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone...Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (verses 13-28).

Christ had put up with the hate-filled jealousy, self-righteousness and callousness of the Pharisees right throughout His ministry. His rebukes were minor compared to this fully-deserved onslaught He gave them right near the end of His ministry.

He showed great anger at the callous, “hyper”critical nature of the Pharisees. Insecurity and jealousy can do crazy things to people and these Pharisees had terribly hard hearts. Christ laid it on the line and called a spade a spade here.

After rebuking the Pharisees He said with tremendous yearning in His heart: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Matthew 23:37-39).

This scene was played incredibly well by the actor who played Christ in the Visual Bible video series. He gave the Pharisees plenty and with great feeling but it was still very much with a sense of a willingness to reconcile with them if they had not been so hard-hearted. After venting His anger at the Pharisees for unnecessarily being so hard-hearted he dropped to His knees and spoke of His yearning for the people of Jerusalem, and all Israel by extension, of how He only wanted to look after and do good to His people but they were not willing. At the end of His words He started to weep terribly and called for His disciples with His hands to come over and comfort Him.

"Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood’” (Mark 12:41-44).

Here we have yet another example of how Jesus went out of His way to give praise and appreciation for acts of kindness that people do. In this case he heaped great praise on the widow for her generosity who proportionately gave more than the many rich people who gave to the treasury.
In John 12:27-30 we read: "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 'Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.' Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to Him.' Jesus answered and said, 'This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.'"

This one of only three occasions were human beings have audibly heard the voice of God the Father. This was to encourage the people to believe that He had sent Jesus. The same purpose was behind the other two occasions at Jesus’ baptism and the transfiguration when the Father said "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him."

In the next chapter He gave the famous Olivet prophecy where He answered the twin questions the disciples posed to Him of when the Temple would be destroyed and what the signs would be leading up to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. They thought the events would be simultaneous, not realizing the destruction of the Temple would occur in 70 AD and the Kingdom would not come for another 2000 years.

Before they went up to the Mount of Olives they paid a visit to the Temple in Jerusalem where the disciples wanted to show Him the wonders of the Temple complex. "Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down' (Matthew 24:1-2). How would Jesus have felt knowing the complete destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem and the great Dispersion of the Jewish people was less than a generation away?

In Matthew 25:31-46 we read: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

God takes it very personally the way we treat others, no matter how lowly and insignificant they are to others in society. This matter of hospitality and whether we do good to others or not is a major litmus test that God uses to determine if we fit to enter into His kingdom.

In Matthew 26:6-13 we read of the story of the woman who anointed Jesus with costly fragrant oil. "And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when
His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.' But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.'

Jesus was deeply appreciative of the reverent attitude of this unnamed woman. While a case could be made for the disciples point of view, Jesus was not the type of person who looked for reasons to criticize others. He actively went out of His way to point out good qualities in people that He met.

**Jesus’ Last Passover and Crucifixion**

Further on in Matthew 26 we come to the account of the last Passover He kept before He was delivered up and killed on the cross. His feelings must have been very heavy at this time knowing the incredible agony He would soon go through was only hours away.

The story of the last Passover begins with His revelation that one of His disciples would betray Him, a revelation which surprised and saddened the rest of the disciples. He had grown very close to this inner circle of disciples who He had chosen, including Judas Iscariot. There has been speculation that Judas was trying to force Jesus' hand to lead a revolt against the Romans by betraying Him and that events simply spun out of control into a scenario that Judas never expected would happen. Perhaps this helps to explain Judas’ remorse and suicide later on. If he took the wrong path but with good intentions not fully appreciating the consequences of his decision this might add to the deep feeling Jesus had for Judas that night. Jesus may have realized he was a pawn in a much grander plan being manipulated by Satan and the Pharisees.

It would have been a deeply moving night for Jesus as He instituted the new symbols for the Passover of the bread and the wine knowing His body would be soon shred to pieces and His blood spilled to pay for the sins of all mankind. He then closed the occasion by saying "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29). The time where He could interact with these twelve dear friends of His was drawing to a close. He was looking forward to the time when He could share a drink of wine with these friends of His in His Father's kingdom when they would reign over the tribes of Israel.

In John 14:7-10 we read: "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.' Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.'"

There's an old saying "Like father like son". This is no more true than in the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ. The Contemporary English Version puts it this way: "God’s Son has all the brightness of God’s own glory and is like him in every way" (Hebrews 1:3).

On His last night with His disciples before His crucifixion Jesus told them: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

Despite the physical torment that He was about to go through Christ had an inner peace of mind and joy knowing everything would work out in the end. We should keep in mind the difference between being happy and being joyful. The word happy comes from the word happenings. We can't be happy during severe trials because our circumstances are not good yet we can be joyful. Joy is an inner calm
that says “Life is not being kind at the moment but I can still rejoice that God has called me and that He loves me and will work things out for me in the end.”

Later that night He said to them "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

While he hid many of the mysteries of the Kingdom from the masses such as when He spoke in parables Jesus was very open and spoke plainly with the disciples who He had deep love for and considered close friends. He spent three and half years constantly with them. This is how He trained His disciples – through interactive discipleship. Close to half of those who come into the church come in through a member that they know and God uses those interactive relationships to teach new disciples.

After they had gone up to the Mount of Olives we read: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.’ Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And so said all the disciples” (Matthew 26:31-35).

In the parallel account in Luke we read: “And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.’ But he said to Him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.’ Then He said, I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me” (Luke 22:31-34).

Jesus knew His disciples better than they knew themselves. He knew just how frail spiritually they were and that they would all desert Him which came to pass soon after. Peter at least stuck around but even he would betray Him and he would do so three times as God brought about three situations which would test whether or not he would confess he was linked to Jesus or not. Did Satan drop in on God's throne in heaven again like he did in Job's day and ask for Peter? It appears from Christ’s words that he may have.

Jesus, knowing that Peter would deny Him three times, does say something encouraging which may not have sunk into Peter's mind till much later. He said when you have returned to me strengthen your brethren. He didn’t say if, he said when. Jesus was fully confident that Peter would repent after his three time denial. He remembers that we are but dust and He also shows faith in our ability to succeed with His help.

"Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’ Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, ‘What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done” (Matt. 26:38-42)

Jesus was incredibly stressed and sorrowful at just how much pain He knew He was about to go. He may have been God in the flesh but He was very much human as well and scared to death by the amount of pain that He was soon to go through. The first time He approaches His Father in prayer He asked if it was possible that this cup of suffering could pass from Him. Was there another way to achieve what needed to be done without having to go through this suffering? He desperately wanted to
not go through the pain if there was another way but there was no other way. His resolve is strengthened when He realizes there is no other way and this is reflected in His next statement. Rather than asking if it is possible that there is a way out, He says if there is no other way then your will be done.

"And He [Jesus] said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will’” (Mark 14:36).

Jesus here in this moment of great pain calls out to the Father and calls Him "Abba". Now, the word Abba here is not a reference to Anna, Benny, Bjorn and Agnetha of the 70's Swedish pop group but is an Aramaic word. It has a special intimate personal feeling to it much like our English words Papa or Daddy. It highlights the incredible deep and personal connection that Jesus had with the Father.

"Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.' Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why have you come?' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?' In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, 'Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.’ Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled" (Matthew 26:48-56).

What would it feel like knowing that He could back out of it at any time? Had he decided He did not want to voluntarily go through with the crucifixion He could have called upon 12 legions of angels (60 000 angels) to prevent His arrest. After they arrested Him all His disciples deserted Him to add insult to injury.

After Peter denied Jesus three times just as Jesus told him he would “the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times”’ (Luke 22:61).

How must have Peter have felt at this moment? He was crushed that he had done such a thing and it must have been like a dagger through the heart when Christ looked at him at the very moment the rooster crowed and he had just betrayed him for the third time. Jesus knows what it feels like to be abandoned as all the disciples abandoned Him at the moment he “needed” them most.

During his trial Jesus said nothing and only spoke when the high priest adjured him which meant He had to answer the question by law. His response was very interesting. "And the high priest arose and said to Him, 'Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?' But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, 'I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!' Jesus said to him, 'It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven’” (Matthew 26:62-64).

When He finally answers He doesn't just say the bare minimum but is deliberately provocative with His words. He says that not only is He the Christ but that they would see Him sitting at the right Hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven. To the Jewish religious leaders this was like the straw that broke the camel's back and they instantly condemned Him to death in their insane jealousy. Jesus was then condemned to death by crucifixion.

On his way to Golgotha “Jesus, turning to them, said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say,
'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'" (Luke 23:28-30).

Christ knew the terrible things that were ahead for the people of Jerusalem. God's judgment for their sins, through the cruel Romans, would come upon them in 40 years time when the great Diaspora would begin and last for nearly 1900 years.

As the Roman soldiers were crucifying him " Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' And they divided His garments and cast lots."

Even on the cross when He was going through torturous pain He had God's greater perspective right at the forefront of His mind and had a forgiving attitude. The pain could have very easily moved Him to anger at them putting Him through it. He saw the greater picture that in a very short time His death would open up permanent forgiveness for all mankind and save them from their sins. His greater perspective helped Him see the sins the Roman soldiers did to Him were because they didn't fully comprehend the magnitude of what they were doing and because Satan was moving them to mistreat Him (Luke 23:34).

"Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, 'If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.' But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.' And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:43).

Jesus was dearly looking forward to His kingdom just as we do. He knew that in a short time He would be resurrected and be with His Father again which He anxiously looked forward to. Jesus also knew that in the thief's next second of consciousness after his death that he would rise up in the second resurrection when the world will have been transformed into a physical paradise. Perhaps Jesus will personally attend to being right there to greet him at his resurrection in the second resurrection.

As He was hanging on the cross and "saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!'" (John 19:26). His faithfulness for the provision of His mother's needs was still important to Him as He asked John to take care of His aging mother.

Right before he died we read what happened in Matthew 27:46: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'"

Did God the Father really forsake Him at this time and if so why? 2 Corinthians 5:21 gives us a clue: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Sin is utterly repugnant to God. At this moment in time all of our sins were, in essence, borne by Him and He became sin for us. It would appear as if God temporarily turned His back on Him symbolizing how utterly repugnant sin is to Him when He became sin for us.

What emotions poured through the Father's heart as He saw His beloved Son in indescribable agony on the cross? Imagine the sorrow that the Father felt when He felt compelled to turn His back on Him as He became sin for us. We can feel Christ's painful sorrow when He cried out "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Imagine the sorrow in the Father's heart as He watched His Son die that dark afternoon.
"Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last. So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, 'Certainly this was a righteous Man!' And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned. But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things" (Luke 23:44-49).

Imagine the incredible relief He must have felt at this moment at having run the course and done the incredibly difficult and even risky job He had to do to make possible the forgiveness of all mankind and open up salvation to all. The Father must have had mixed feelings at this moment in time. He would have felt great pride and joy in His Son for doing the difficult job He had to do. At the same time there would have been great sorrow that temporarily He had lost His beloved Son and best friend to a cruel death. Other than the unconscious spirit record of Him, His Son had been wiped out of existence.

Just as the Father had sent angels to announce the birth of His Son, He also provided miraculous events to announce the death of His Son. There was an incredible darkness that came over the land in the mid afternoon, the veil of the Temple was torn in two to picture the kind of direct access that mankind had to God now that Christ had paid for mankind's sins and many people who had recently died were resurrected to a short physical life.

"Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:51-54).

It appears as if God had given His Holy Spirit to a number of people who had of a normal lifespan died shortly before Christ's death for just this purpose as a witness of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. We know that John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth, had the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41) and presumably his father as well (Luke 1:6). Simeon, who died shortly after being able to hold the baby Jesus, also had the Holy Spirit (Luke 2:25). One wonders if the centurion present at the death of Christ who reverently acknowledged Him as the Son of God after seeing the miracles that accompanied His death was the same centurion who's servant Jesus healed.

We know that Christ's flesh was torn and broken but why did God make sure that none of His bones would be broken (John 19:33-36), as is pictured by the Passover lamb being roasted whole with no bones broken (Exodus 12:43-46)?

Our bones make up our inner framework and picture our inner strength. I suspect the importance of God ensuring His bones weren't broken is a type of Christ's inner strength of character, through God's spirit, not being broken through the ordeal that He went through. He did not compromise an inch with sin through all that He went through (1 Peter 2:21-23). By doing so He left a very powerful example for us to follow in not compromising with God's way of life as we go through trials.

**Jesus' Resurrection**

The sorrow of Christ's death was then turned to great joy three days later when the Father resurrected His Son from the dead.

"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken away the Lord out of the
tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.’ Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again to their own homes” (John 20:1-10).

Christ had told the disciples on more than one occasion that He would be crucified AND rise again and yet it didn’t sink in or, at least, God didn’t let it sink in.

"But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.’ Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, ‘Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him, ‘Rabboni!’ (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’ Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her” (John 20:11-18).

Mary Magdalene, who was not only a woman but possibly had been a prostitute prior to becoming a disciple, was given by God the privilege to be the first person to see Christ after His resurrection. Christ would then ascend to heaven to be accepted by God the Father as the true wavesheaf offering (Leviticus 23:10-11). He went to heaven and back in the same day which shows how infinitely fast a spirit being can travel – way faster than warp factor ten on Star Trek.

When Christ ascended to Heaven to be accepted by His Father you can be sure that it was not an unemotional affair. They would have embraced each other and possibly wept spiritual tears of joy just as the father embraced his son who was lost but now was found. The dramatic scene of what it was like when Christ, the Lamb of God, came before His Father and was accepted is pictured in vision in Revelation 4 and 5.

After being reunited with His Father in heaven it was then time to be reunited with His disciples.

"Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, ‘What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?’

"Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, ‘Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?’ And He said to them, ‘What things?’ So they said to Him, ‘The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive.
And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.'

"Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, 'Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.' And He went in to stay with them. 'Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?' So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!'" (Luke 24:13-27).

Here we see Jesus' sense of humour again when He had a little fun and tom foolery by hiding His identity from His disciples and disappearing right at the moment they finally recognized Him.

"Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

"Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord.' So he said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.' And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'" (John 20:19-29).

Imagine the joy at being re-united with His disciples; these dear close friends who He interacted with constantly for the past three and a half years. Jesus seemed to transform from His spirit body to the physical body He died in with its wounds and fist-size opening when He offered Thomas proof of His resurrection. Perhaps raising and using His physical body as proof for Thomas was what Jesus was referring to when He said "Destroy this temple, and in three days I [not the Father] will raise it up" (John 2:19).

When Jesus appeared again to His disciples on the shores of Lake Galilee we read: "Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.' Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and eat breakfast'" (John 21:9-12). Jesus here was a good host and prepared breakfast for them.

"So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes,
Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.'” (John 21:15-17).

After the resurrection Jesus here re-created the physical surroundings of Peter's denial with a charcoal-fire breakfast and then asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Each time Peter replied, "Lord, you know that I love you." Now, the questions were not for Jesus' sake. They were Peter's. Just as Peter denied Him three times, Christ wanted three affirmations so Peter's resolve would be strengthened and he would be able to be the lead apostle and eventually die for Christ's sake.

What is interesting about this passage in John 21 is that when Christ asked, "Do you love me?", the Greek word used for love is agape which means the total unconditional love of God. When Peter tells Christ "you know I love you" the Greek word that Peter uses is philio, meaning brotherly love.

I've wondered why Peter answered with philio and not agape and the best answer I could come up with is that Peter felt truly humbled. He realized of his own strength that he could not promise the total unconditional love of God to Christ given that He had failed so miserably to do so when he denied Christ only days earlier. Instead he promised his best under the circumstances which was philio.

When he came to see himself as the weak human being that he was, the deep pain he felt from denying Christ was instrumental in providing the motivation to rid himself of the impetuousness that often got him into trouble. He eventually went on to become a great pillar in the early church of God and his epistles have many references to the benefits of trials in the Christian life in producing godly character.

One other interesting sidebar to this story is that in one of the three times He asked Peter to look after the spiritual flock of God He said "Feed my lambs". God is very interested and cares for the young people in His church who are the next generation of christians.

Some of the values that Jesus Christ held up constantly during His life are very well summarized by Dr. James Dobson in his book "Dr. Dobson Answers Your Questions". Here are according to Dr. Dobson the four fundamental values of Christianity:

1) A belief in the inestimable worth and significance of human life in all dimensions, including the unborn, the aged, the widowed, the mentally retarded, the unattractive, the physically handicapped, those of different races and backgrounds to us and every other condition in which humanness is expressed from conception to the grave.

2) An unyielding dedication to the institution of marriage as a permanent, life-long relationship, regardless of trials, sickness, financial reverses or emotional stresses that may ensue.

3) A dedication to the task of bearing and raising children, even in a topsy-turvy world that denigrates this procreative privilege.

4) A commitment to the ultimate purpose of living: the attainment of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, beginning within our own families and then reaching out to a suffering humanity that does not know of His love and sacrifice. Compared to this overriding objective, no other human endeavour is of any significance or meaning whatsoever (p.502).

The Apostle John closes His Gospel with these words: "There are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).
In **John 13:34** Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another". When you think about the example of Jesus Christ in how He loved others, He really has raised the bar quite considerably by asking us to love others as He did. The incredible way in which He raised the standard by His example is what is so incredible and "new" about this command to love others.

Jesus was the ultimate example of love who perfectly exemplified the words "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (**John 15:13**).

**God's Style of Speech**

The way in which we phrase our words is a distinct part of our own personal speaking style. Jesus exhibited His own individual speaking style in the way He spoke the things that He said during His ministry. Before we look at it a little bit more closely I'd like to quote from Stephen Collins’ book "The Lost Ten Tribes of Israel...Found!" in which he documents what possibly may be an extra-biblical letter from Jesus to a Parthian vassal king:

Eusebius was a famous Christian historian who lived from 260 A.D. until 340 A.D...Eusebius was not a man given to wild claims. Let us examine his own words about the exchange between King Abgar of Edessa and Jesus Christ. Eusebius begins: '..when King Abgar, the brilliantly successful monarch of the peoples of Mesopotamia, who was dying from a terrible physical disorder which no human power could heal, heard continual mention of the name of Jesus and unanimous tribute to His miracles, he sent a humble request to him by a letter-carrier, begging relief from his disease.'

This record that news of Jesus' miracles was commonly heard in Parthia's western provinces confirms that the trade routes must have been full of news about Jesus' exploits. The following excerpt from King Abgar's letter to Jesus is taken from Eusebius' account:

'Abgar...to Jesus, who has appeared as a gracious saviour in the region of Jerusalem--greeting. I have heard about you and about the cures you perform...If the report is true, you make the blind see again and the lame walk about; you cleanse lepers...and raise the dead...? I concluded that...either you are God and came down from heaven to do these things, or you are God's Son doing them. Accordingly I am writing you to beg you to come to me, whatever the inconvenience, and cure the disorder from which I suffer.. I may add that I understand the Jews are treating you with contempt and desire to injure you: my city is very small, but highly esteemed, adequate for both of us.'

The reports heard by Abgar closely parallel the narratives in the Gospel accounts about the miracles of Jesus. King Abgar professes his faith in Jesus, is desperate for Jesus to come, and offers him refuge in Edessa from the risks faced by Jesus in Jerusalem. It is remarkable that Eusebius preserved for us a record that Jesus was given an official offer of sanctuary in Parthian territory from the dangers he faced in Jerusalem. According to Eusebius the reply was sent by Jesus Christ himself to King Abgar by a courier named Ananias.

'Happy are you who believed in me without having seen me! For it is written of me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, and those who have not seen me will believe and live. As to your request that I should come to you, I must complete all that I was sent to do here, and on completing it must at once be taken up to the One who sent me. When I have been taken up I will send you one of my disciples to cure your disorder and bring life to you and those with you.'
This letter attributed to Jesus would have been about three hundred years old when Eusebius read it in the Royal Records of Edessa, and it reflects a doctrine and attitude entirely compatible with that expressed by Jesus in the Gospel accounts. There is more to the story. According to Eusebius, the archives of Edessa revealed that after Jesus' death and resurrection Thaddaeus (mentioned in Mark 3:18) was sent by the Apostle Thomas to Edessa. Once there, he not only healed many of King Abgar's subjects, but also laid hands on King Abgar himself and healed the king. King Abgar ordered his subjects to assemble and hear the preaching of Thaddaeus, and offered him silver and gold (which Thaddaeus refused). King Abgar is quoted as stating to Thaddaeus:

'I believed in Him (Jesus) so strongly that I wanted to take an army and destroy the Jews who crucified Him, if I had not been prevented by the imperial power of Rome to do so.'

Remarkable! Here is a record of a Parthian vassal king wishing to mount a military campaign to punish those responsible for crucifying Jesus Christ...This account confirms that Jesus had strong supporters within the Parthian Empire, justifying Rome's reluctance to interfere with his life" (p.303-306).

Let's look at those possible words of Jesus again: "Happy are you who believed in me without having seen me! For it is written of me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, and those who have not seen me will believe and live." That's sounds distinctly similar to John 20:29 where Jesus said: "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

"As to your request that I should come to you, I must complete all that I was sent to do here, and on completing it must at once be taken up to the One who sent me. When I have been taken up I will send you one of my disciples to cure your disorder and bring life to you and those with you."

Jesus frequently used phrases like "the Father who sent me" (John 6:44) and "Him who sent me" (John 9:4) which are very similar to the phrase used here "the One who sent me".

Jesus in many of his discussions used a lot of very simple child-like phrases and concepts, a style that was copied by arguably His best friend on earth during His ministry, the Apostle John (John 21:20), in his epistles. We see a lot of this style used by Jesus in John 7 and 8. Much of His teaching to His disciples was fairly clear and easy to understand, especially when the Holy Spirit assisted them after they received it (John 14:26).

Jesus said that the words that He spoke came from the Father (John 14:10) so there may well be a lot of similarity between the style of speech of the Father and Jesus Christ.

In science fiction movies the more advanced a species is, the more cryptic and laconic their speech is. There does seem to be an element of truth in God being this way as well. Many of the Old Testament prophecies have an element of this in being quite cryptic at times.

"Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line. Here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:9-10).

God wants us to use our minds and stretch ourselves to do the best that we can and learn from His word. It's in the striving that we learn to value the truth that we discover like buried treasure in His word. In his book "Mystery of the Ages" Herbert Armstrong wrote:
I found the Bible to be a coded book, with answers to the paramount mysteries confronting all humanity...I learned that the Bible is like a jigsaw puzzle -- thousands of pieces that need putting together -- and the pieces will fit together in only one way. Then the picture becomes crystal clear to the one willing to believe what God our Creator says...The Bible needs no interpretation because it interprets itself. This becomes clear when one sees the various scriptures of each subject properly put together, as the Bible itself says, "here a little, and there a little" (Isaiah 28:10)...

God deliberately coded his book so that it would not be understood until our modern time. Why was this purposely done? Even that is a mystery...In the 12th chapter of Daniel we read even that devout man of God could not understand that which was given to him to write as part of the Bible. He said he heard, but understood not. The revealing angel said, "Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (Authorized Version). In the 12th chapter of Daniel, it says at this time of the end the "wise" would understand, but "none of the wicked shall understand." Who, then, are the "wise" who may understand the Bible? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10) and "a good understanding have all they that do his commandments" God could have put the Bible together in a very plain simple way that everyone could understand similar to the way Herbert Armstrong wrote but He chose to put it together in a way that is a challenge to understand.

In a sermon on the Word of God for UCG's Fundamentals of Belief tape series, Graemme Marshall makes these comments:

[The Bible was] written by not just one author but by 40 people. It stretches over a period of 1500 years out of different places and situations. What book ever extended over such an enormous writing period yet has such uniformity, exactness and consistency? How likely is it that different authors could write hundreds of years apart under different situations in different languages and still be consistent with their message?

The Bible's authors come from diverse walks of life – kings like David and Solomon, national leaders like Moses, a prime minister (Daniel), a former Pharisee (the apostle Paul), a military general (Joshua), a shepherd (Amos), a tax collector (Matthew), fishermen (Peter, James and John), a doctor (Luke), an emperor's cupbearer (Nehemiah) and prophets like Jeremiah. What an unlikely assembly of characters to write this revered book. This one volume miraculously ties together the same theme and the same message while presenting history, prophecy, law, poetry, proverbs, songs and pastoral letters. This was accomplished by Divine consistency. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

The apostle Peter wrote that "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Bible's consistency and balance points to one Divine author who conveyed His instruction manual to mankind through the different styles and personalities of different writers who were inspired by God's spirit. The Bible is truly an incredible book. It begins with a garden, a tree of life and an invitation to enjoy it (Genesis 2-3) and it ends with that same theme of a garden and the tree of life and man and God ultimately enjoying an intimate relationship living peacefully together (Revelation 22).
I find it ironic and humorous that the Song of Solomon with its erotic language just happens to be in the very middle of the Bible in the common order that we have. Someone once referred to it as the "centrefold of the Bible."

God certainly has a penchant for using prose and poetry throughout His word. God also knows the power of a good story. God has started His book, the Bible, with some of the most powerful stories ever told. From the poetic elegance of the Creation account to the mighty deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt by the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea God knows how to impress lessons on us with great stories. We can know all the theory in the world about how to live a godly life but great examples of kindness and love help us to much better understand what love is about than any theological explanation (1 Corinthians 10:11).

In his excellent book "The Authority of the Bible" Colin Peckham describes many of the wonderful shadows and types of New Testament events in the Old Testament:

"The history of the Israelites pictures the New Testament plan of salvation showing that the Old Testament and the New Testament present one message. In the Old Testament it is the shadows and types, and in the New Testament we have the reality of an accomplished salvation.

"The Israelites were in bondage to the Egyptians. Egypt is a picture of the old life of sin in which all are held under the domination of Pharaoh, who represents the devil. The only way to be rescued from Egypt's bondage and God's judgement was through the blood of the lamb. They were to be spared from the judgement of God, which rested on the whole land, only by applying the blood to their doorposts. This, of course, is a picture of God's judgement on the sinful world, from which we can escape solely by applying the blood of the Lamb of God to our hearts. The judgement passed from the people to the lamb. The slain lamb is the substitute for the first-born, and God's Lamb is our substitute. He dies in our place, and we are free from the old life of bondage, sorrow and sin through the blood of the Lamb [1 Corinthians 5:7].

"On their journey they were immediately fed on manna from heaven, a picture of Jesus nourishing His people, as He Himself explains when they said to Him: 'Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life unto the world...I am the bread of life' (John 6:31-35).

"They needed water, and when Moses struck the rock the water flowed for all to quench their thirst. Paul tells us that 'they drank of that spiritual Rock...and that Rock was Christ' (1 Corinthians 10:4)...Their eventful journey from Egypt had one objective, to bring them to Canaan; 'Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to ou fathers' (Deuteronomy 6:23). As many able commentators have affirmed, the picture of Canaan is that of the life of Christian victory and [entering His kingdom]...

"Abraham and Isaac are clear Old Testament types of New Testament truths. Like Jesus, Isaac was born contrary to the laws of nature. Isaac was mocked by his brother (Genesis 21:9), and Jesus was rejected by the Jews. Isaac was the sole heir of all that his father possessed (Genesis 24:36), and Jesus is 'appointed heir of all things' (Hebrews 1:2).
"Abraham and Isaac walked up the hill of sacrifice with Isaac carrying the wood upon which he was to die (Genesis 22:6), a picture of Calvary, where Jesus carried the Cross. Abraham, the father, was to kill his beloved son. Of Jesus it is written that he was 'stricken, smitten of God' (Isaiah 53:4). God, the Father, smote His beloved Son. Isaac rose from this virtual death and entered into his inheritance. When Jesus rose from the dead all the riches of heaven were His. This whole story is a beautiful picture of the sacrificing Father and the submissive Son. The ram caught in the thicket and sacrificed instead of Isaac is another aspect of the substitutionary death of Christ.

"Joseph is an enthralling picture of Christ. He, the first-born son of Rachel, was sent on a long journey by his father to his brothers, who, on his arrival, held him prisoner and then sold him to foreigners for twenty pieces of silver. Jesus, the first-born, came all the way from heaven to earth to His own people, but they did not receive Him (John 1:11). instead they rejected Him, selling Him for thirty pieces of silver and handing Him over to a foreign power to be crucified.

"Joseph died figuratively in the prisons of Egypt but eventually returned as the conquering ruler, with a plan of salvation for all the starving multitudes of the world. There was food enough to feed them all. Although he had disappeared from public view, having been wrongly accused, he returned as the saviour of the world. Jesus, too, was wrongly accused and put to death, but He returned from the dead with a plan of salvation that has been published to the ends of the earth. He is the mighty Saviour of all who will come and receive the salvation He offers. He brings life and health to the starving multitudes of earth.

"Moses is a picture of Christ, for immediately after his birth the evil rulers sought to kill him. He escaped but they killed many other little boys at that time. Mary and Joseph fled with their precious child to Egypt whilst the slaughter of the innocent children took place in Israel (Matthew 2:16-18).

"He instituted the Passover (Exodus 12:14-28), that wonderful picture of Calvary where the blood of the lamb was struck on the doorposts of Israelite homes, saving them from the wrath of Yahweh. The lamb was the substitute for their first-born. The New Testament affirms, 'Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us' (1 Corinthians 5:7). He was our substitute Lamb.

"Moses became the wonderful leader, saving them from the yoke of bondage in Egypt and leading them out on an untried way. Delivered from the old life of slavery, they now had to depend on God for their very existence. There was no food in the desert. It had to come from heaven, and on that heavenly food they lived. Jesus saves from Satan’s cruel bondage, separating us from the old life of sorrow and sin and leading us out in the wilderness of this world where there is no food for the soul. He is our very life, for we live in Him and feed on Him, the heavenly Manna, the living Bread.

"Joshua was the great leader and conqueror of the land of Canaan. He took them over the Jordan and led them in their central, southern and northern campaigns until the land was subdued. He brought them peace and stability instead of their restless wanderings in the wilderness - again a picture of Christ leading us to a life of victory and rest.
“David the shepherd boy became Israel's greatest king. He killed Goliath with one of his five chosen stones. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, He quoted three times from Deuteronomy, one of the five books of Moses, and emerged victorious from the temptation.

“When David finally came to the throne he looked for those of the house of Saul that he might show them kindness 'for Jonathan's sake' (2 Samuel 9). Mephibosheth was found and he ate at David’s table continually in Jerusalem. God shows us kindness for Jesus' sake and accepts us into His family where we partake of the delicacies of heaven in the presence of the King.

“When David was established as king, Absalom his son conspired against him, eventually overthrowing him and driving him into the wilderness. In this rebellion, David was betrayed by those in his inner circle. Ahithophel, David's influential counsellor (2 Samuel 15:12), and wonderful friend, (Psalm 55:12-14, 21), became one of the conspirators and joined the revolt. His later counsel to Absalom was not followed, and, in sorrow of heart, he hanged himself (2 Samuel 17:23). Jesus, too, was betrayed by one in the inner circle. Zechariah, in his prophecy, asks about the wounds in his hands, and receives the reply that they are 'those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends' (Zechariah 13:6). Judas Iscariot was one of Christ's closest associates on earth and he betrayed Him. He too, like Ahithophel, was filled with sorrow, and in remorse he hanged himself (Matthew 27:5).

“Above all, David was the warrior king who subdued all his enemies and brought peace to the land, a wonderful picture of our all-conquering Lord. David’s sure trust and close relationship with God is woven into all his writings. The Psalms breathe an intimacy of communion with the Lord. Jesus, too, enjoyed that closeness and oneness with the Father...

“Solomon instituted the brightest age of Israel's history. It was Israel's golden age when the nation rose to its highest fame and achieved its greatest influence, extending its borders to the furthest limits. It is a picture of Christ in His great glory...

“In the book of Exodus we read how the Israelites journeyed from Egypt to Canaan. On the journey they constructed a tabernacle where God dwelt among His people. It was erected in the centre of the camp. The outward covering was of badger skins...

“Beneath the badger skins were the coverings of rams' skins dyed red, signifying Christ's death. Beneath the rams' skins were the curtains of goats' hair, speaking of the prophets' clothing, and signifying Christ’s prophetic role. Beneath the goats' hair were the beautiful curtains of fine twined linen, signifying Christ's righteousness - embroidered with blue (His heavenly character), purple (His regal character), and red (His earthly character).

“In the Holy Place was the Table of Shewbread ('I am the bread of life' - John 6:48), the Golden Candlestick ('I am the light of the world' - John 8:12), and the Golden Altar of incense ('He ever lives to make intercession for them' - Hebrews 7:25).

“In the Holiest of all was the Ark - a box made of shittim wood, signifying Christ's humanity, and completely covered with gold, speaking of His deity, and all beautifully blended in one unit. Here we have typified the deity and manhood of Jesus Christ. 'God was manifested in the flesh' (1 Timothy 3:16). God and man - one Christ, one glorious Person, is presented to us here. The wood and the gold were
moulded together. At the heart of the place where God met with man is a revelation of the incarnation. God deigned to identify with man by actually uniting with him in this intensely intricate, personal and mysterious way. God and man blended together in Jesus Christ. 'God was in Christ.'

"The Ark was covered by the Mercy Seat, which was a slab of pure gold. It formed the lid of the Ark. Only once a year the high priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people. When he did so, on the Day of Atonement, he sprinkled blood on that gold slab. The blood from the earth trickled on to the gold, which represented deity. Again there is this strange and marvellous union. This is where God meets man! 'There I will meet with you' (Exodus 25:17-22). Here is Christ's sacrifice. Here is God in Christ shedding His precious blood as an offering for our sins. Here is Calvary.

"Here, then, is the Incarnation and the Crucifixion typified in one item of furniture - the Ark. It is here, in Christ typified, that God meets man. His incarnation and His crucifixion are inextricably linked together. Bethlehem and Calvary are inseparable.

"In the Ark were three things:

"1. The golden pot containing manna - a picture of Christ's life and provision for His people.
"2. The tables of the Covenant with the Ten Commandments, which Christ alone kept perfectly.
"3. Aaron's rod that budded, a picture of Christ's resurrection.

"The Veil of blue, purple and red, separating the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies illustrates again in its three colours, the Divinity, Kingship and Humanity of Christ. The veil was His flesh (Hebrews 10:20). When Christ died, God rent the veil from top to bottom. He was 'smitten of God'. 'It pleased the Lord to bruise Him' (Isaiah 53:4, 10). When the veil was torn asunder, the way into the Holy of Holies stood wide open. Man could now enter God's presence. When Jesus died, He became the way to God. Through His rent body, through His death, the way into the presence of God was at last open. We have access through Christ's death into the very presence of God.

"Therefore, whilst the external appearance of the Tabernacle was merely that of a tent (the humanity of Christ disguises His deity), inside, the glory of God and His marvellous plan of salvation were portrayed. It spoke of the Incarnation, of the Crucifixion, of God meeting man in Christ. Only in Jesus Christ does God meet man, and the Tabernacle is a beautiful type of His person and work.

"The system of the Levitical priesthood and its offerings is described in Leviticus 1-7. There are five offerings; the first three are called sweet-savour offerings, and the last two, non sweet-savour offerings. The first three typify Christ in His perfection and devotion to the will of God.

"They are the Whole Burnt Offering [pictures us offering our lives totally to God like Christ did], the Meal Offering [pictures our service to God and providing for our fellow man since most of this offering went to the priests] and the Peace Offering [a festive offering shared between the offerer, the priest and God picturing the unity and fellowship that we are working towards and living at peace with God and man]. The last two are the Sin Offering [for unintentional sins] and the Trespass Offering
[for specified sins], and typify Christ as bearing the failure, sin and punishment of the sinner” (p. 68-79).

The Bible is truly an incredible book. It begins with a garden, a tree of life and an invitation to enjoy it (Genesis 2-3) and it ends with that same theme of a garden and the tree of life and man and God ultimately enjoying an intimate relationship living peacefully together (Revelation 22).

God’s Emotions and Personality as seen in Acts and the Epistles

In Acts 2:36-47 we read: ‘’[Peter said] Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’

“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

How must have God felt when the New Testament church was begun in such a way. There is great joy in heaven when even one sinner turns to repentance and here we have thousands being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit at this time. There would have been great rejoicing in heaven at the repentance and the great love these new converts had for one another. God would have especially rejoiced at the depth of courage that the apostles now had in preaching the Word with such enthusiasm despite the persecution that they endured at times.

Probably the most dramatic conversion of anyone in the Bible was the conversion of the Apostle Paul where God turns him around 180 degrees from being on his way to murder God’s people to becoming one of them. The story is recorded for us in Acts 9:

“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ So the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.’ Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much
harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.' And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

"Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?’ But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ" (verses 1-22).

He thought he was being zealous for God by persecuting this heretical group of Christians but a personal encounter with Jesus opened his eyes to just how wrong he was. God knew that he had doubts in his mind about his actions which he was trying to bury in his mind. This is what was meant when Jesus said "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." God knew the potential of this man and the kind of witness he could be for Him. As stubborn as Paul was in trying to bury the thought that his misguided zeal was wrong, God knew he would no longer fight against the truth once the truth was clear and unambiguous to him that Jesus was the Christ.

God has the incredible ability to see the extra-ordinary potential of people even when they are fighting against Him and His people at the time. With this encounter he set up Paul perfectly to strike his conscience enough to turn his life over to Him.

In those three days of blindness when he had time to contemplate just how wrong he was, the guilt must have hit him like a ton of bricks. The apostle Paul would be another example of the principle of how deep pain often produces deep repentance.

Before his conversion he was responsible for the persecution and death of many early Christians. Can you imagine what it would have been like for Paul to preach before congregations knowing that sitting in the audience sometimes were members who had family or friends whose deaths he was responsible for? How do you think that awareness would have motivated him to go over and above in serving God and the early church of God?

Jesus said to Ananias in vision about Paul: "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." Paul was suffer more than any other Christian in the early church of God (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Why did God decree that Paul would have to suffer so much for His name's sake? One possibility was to counter the possibility of him getting puffed up given the heavenly visions that he was shown by God (2 Corinthians 12:1-9). Another possibility was as a judgment from God for the persecution that he had meted out on the early church. No one could accuse God of letting Paul get off easy for the persecution that he had done to the church.

Soon after Paul's conversion the first Gentile would be baptized into the church. It was amazing how the Jewish mindset of God's religion and salvation being just for the nation of Israel persisted in the early church of God. Jesus even told the apostles to go out to all the world and baptize people of all nations. Even after the first few years it took a miracle by God clearly demonstrated to Peter to show that God was to be the God of all nations and not just of Israel and that salvation was intended for all peoples, Jews and Gentiles alike.
After God clearly shows to Peter Gentiles were to be accepted into the church Peter then said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34-35).

In Acts 17:26 we read: “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.” God guides the nations and races to their inheritance. Consider the positioning of the various races. The black peoples, who have better skin protection from the heat of the sun, tend to be situated close to the equator compared to the white peoples which are situated in the temperate zones. This is even the case with the Oriental peoples with their different shades of skin colour.

God has also appointed their times to migrate to their lands and times to come to dominate in this world at a sub-conscious level. Most peoples and races have had periods of time when they dominated and had great empires from Assyria, Babylon and Rome to the Mongolian, Spanish and British empires. God is a God of order in all of this and I suspect that He also has had a hand in the orderly development of the different accents that different peoples have around the world.

Peter here says that God shows no partiality or prejudice based on race, colour or creed. This is further emphasized in Romans 2:11 and James 2:1-9. The last time we read about the twelve apostles in the book of Acts is half way into the book in Acts 15. From there we read nothing more about them (though they did do much more) and Luke continues the story only with the ministry of Paul. Why was the book of Acts written that way?

The original 12 apostles primarily preached to the Jews as well as travelling to Asia Minor and Europe where the lost tribes were (Matthew 10:6, Galatians 2:7, James 1:1). After Acts 15 little is heard of the original 12 apostles. Luke wrote the book of Acts primarily to show the transition between God working just with physical Israelites to God calling and working with Gentiles. It would emphasize that God is not just the God of Israel but is the Creator and God of all nations.

The church started with physical Israelites and then God began to call Gentiles. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

God’s punishment will come first on Israel and then on the Gentiles (Isaiah 10:5-12). After Christ returns God will first work with physical Israel and offer them the chance to be spiritual Israelites (Ezekiel 20:34-36) and then, through their example when they do repent, God will open up salvation to the Gentile nations.

Israel will become God's model nation and all nations will be blessed because of their example. God is not playing favourites with Israel as all people of all nations will have their chance at salvation and eternal life. God is a God of order and has a purpose for working first with Israel and then with the rest of the nations afterwards.

There is an interesting quality about God that is explained in Romans 4:16-17 where we read: “Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.”

God calls those things which aren't yet as though they are. God is in ultimate control of how things will unfold in our lives. Nothing happens which He does not allow. With God all things are possible. God has great vision and will often call things not as they are now but what they will be later on such as calling Abraham a father of many nations when his wife was childless and already beyond childbearing years.
In Romans 8:32-39 we read about the incredible depth of God's love for His people: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Nothing can separate us from God's love. If God has given up His Son to pay for our sins how can anyone say that He won't follow through and give us all things that we are to co-inherit with Christ in the first resurrection (Hebrews 2:8)?

In 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 we read: "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence."

God's way is different from the way that we might have done things if we were God calling out a people now. He has deliberately chosen to call the "foolish" of the world so that no flesh should glory. To confound the wise later on He chooses to use the "fools" of this world to do His Work that no flesh should glory and take the credit for the great plan God is working out here through mankind. In one sense when others are called later on they will be able to say that if so and so made it then anyone can make it into God's kingdom.

In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we read: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." We see here emphasis yet again placed on God's faithfulness. He knows our true limits better than we know them ourselves. He will always provide deliverance from trials before that are truly beyond us.

We often will go through trials thinking that they are unbearable but God knows there is often more in us to be able to bear and grow from the trials we are going through. This scripture is the reason why suicide is not an option for Christians. We have God's promise to deliver us from every trial so we have no excuse to terminate our lives. God can and will deliver us from the trials we have gotten ourselves into.

In the context of what we take in for our spiritual diet Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:21-22: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" God is moved to jealousy when we think we can stand firm by deliberately staying in a spiritually cold or lukewarm environment when we have the option to be in a healthier spiritual environment.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:33: "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." A few verses later he wrote: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (verse 40). God is not a God of confusion but of order. He likes things done decently and in order and He likes His surroundings to be pleasant and tidy. When it comes to pleasant and neat surroundings the Germanic people, particularly the Swiss, have a real God-given talent. Their countryside is very
beautiful, tidy and well-ordered. Swiss and German engineering also reflects this orderly strength that these people have.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:1-3: "Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

Paul had a godly jealousy for those in the church that they would not be unfaithful and go after false teachings and he was protective of them against the false teachers who would try to corrupt them from the simplicity that is in Christ.

When I first started to attend church one of the most frequent comments that I heard when discussing God’s truth was that "it all makes sense". You could see how each doctrine fit in and dovetailed with every other doctrine and there seemed to be this incredible consistent theme that ran through our understanding of the doctrines. When the doctrinal apostasy of the 1990’s hit the Worldwide Church of God very few members commented on how the new teachings made sense. Far more comments were heard such as "I'm confused about this" or "It just doesn't make sense". The reason for that was that the complex, convoluted new teachings on the Godhead and others were not the simplicity of Christ's true teachings.

In Ephesians 3:9 we read “God who created all things through Jesus Christ.” While the Father originates the ideas of how things are created in this world He loves to delegate the execution of those wonderful plans to His Son and enjoys seeing His Son bringing those wonderful plans into existence.

Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6 “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

God will persist with us until the job is done. He will NEVER give up on us. The only way that we won't make it once He has called us is if we turn our back on Him. God has awesome love and persistence with the goal He has for bringing us into His very family.

In the next chapter Paul gives this description of the mind of Jesus Christ: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

Other translations say that Christ did not consider it something to be grasped at to be equal with God. His complete faith and trust in God the Father's perfect wisdom and will meant that He was prepared to do whatever His Father asked of Him. His love for us was so great that He had complete humility and was willing to divest Himself of all the powers that He had as a God being and be an ordinary human being and give up His existence in the most painful way imaginable. Paul wanted us to be willing to put the needs of others ahead of our own just as Jesus did.

In 1 Timothy 1:11 refers to God as the "blessed God”. The Greek word for blessed can also be translated as happy. God is a blessed or happy God. The world's view of God is as a being who is stern, inflexible and authoritarian. Most idols of pagan gods and even most statues of Christ are expressionless and sombre. The Bible paints a much different view of God who loves us and life with a passion and who is a happy and cheerful God. One of the fruits of God's spirit is that of joy and Christ said "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).
Paul writes in Hebrews 4:15-16: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Christ can sympathize with the pain we go through. The Father has experienced the depths of emotional pain as He has watched us stumble through life and most of humanity turn their back on Him but He has never experienced physical pain and many of the various trials we as human go through.

As well as paying for our sins, the life that Jesus lived here on earth when He became flesh and tabernacled with us (John 1:14), helped Him to better empathize with what we, as humans, go through. Having experienced awful physical pain in the flesh He can really “feel our pain”. It’s one thing to watch someone go through a problem and it’s another thing altogether having been through that same experience. It’s also important to note that Jesus was tempted in all points as we are. Satan threw every single temptation He could at Jesus in a bid to make Him fail in His plan.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 Paul writes: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.”

God is a God of comfort. He feels for what we go through and yearns to help comfort us when we go through problems in life. In his far-sighted wisdom He sometimes allows us go through severe and different trials at times. Many problems in life Jesus never personally experienced (eg. rape or drug addiction, etc.). He often calls people who have been through all sorts of different and terrible trials so that the “sufferings of Christ abound in us”.

After the Great Tribulation and with all those who come up in the second resurrection we are going to have to deal with people who have been through every conceivable and horrible problem. God wants to have people to help them who have been through as many of the same problems they have so they can best empathize and help those we have to deal with at that time.

In Hebrews 11:6 we read: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

God is a rewarder of those who believe in Him and diligently seek Him. When He sees us give to others and trying our hearts out to obey Him with a sincere heart God is moved by that and will be generous in return. We have to have faith in His generosity.

In a documentary that I saw on Lord Nelson who defeated the French at Trafalgar, one of the commentators made a comment that great men make great mistakes. I found that comment encouraging from the point of view that even if you make great mistakes you can still go on to do great things for God. A good example of this is in the faith chapter, Hebrews 11. It’s encouraging that when God chose to remember them in this chapter He chose to remember them by their great deeds and not by their faults. Regardless of how spectacularly you may have failed today you always have a fresh start from tomorrow on to become a great success if you learn from your mistakes. In fact, those mistakes may help you to be an even better success.
In psychological terms the drive we have to make up for our weaknesses or wrongs we may have done in the past is called compensation. Many people with physical, mental and family handicaps have done remarkable things throughout history because they have developed their strengths in their desire to compensate for their weaknesses and achieve esteem and self-confidence.

In the Amplified Version of Hebrews 13:5 we read: "I will not in any way fail you nor give you up, nor leave you without any support. I will not, I will not, I will not in any degree leave you helpless, nor forsake you nor let you down or relax my hold on you – Assuredly not!"

The Amplified Version of this verse does a great job amplifying the reality and depth of God's love and faithfulness to us. As Philippians 1:6 says: "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it". Like Job we can go through bad trials thinking that God has forsaken us when in reality He is intensely interested in our situation, subtly working out His plan in us to grow more in His character. God really is much more faithful to us than a faithful golden retriever.

In Hebrews 13:8 we read: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Jesus is not moody and inconsistent in His dealings with us. His love and faithfulness to us is absolutely consistent and totally dependable.

In James 4:6 we read: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” When people are proud and boastful that they are God’s chosen one for His work that usually is a red flag that they are not. God can’t work much with those who are proud and self-righteous and don't see their need for change. Most of us don't like those who are show-offs and “up themselves”. It's not much different with God. He prefers to deal with those who are humble and willing to be worked with and change in those areas that need change in their lives.

God wants us to “cast ALL of our cares upon Him” (1 Peter 5:7). Not some but ALL of them - big and small! God takes a very personal interest in each and every one of us. God is concerned with anything and everything - no matter how seemingly small and insignificant - that could in any way affect the quality of the final work of art - the character that He is creating within us (Philippians 1:6).

The Apostle John writes in 1 John 4:8: “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." He simply says that God IS love. His actions all throughout history and in the pages of the Bible exemplify what unselfish, outgoing concern for others is all about far and above the limited way in which we love one another.

**God’s Feelings and Personality in the Book of Revelation**

The Book of Revelation covers the consummation of God’s great plan for mankind when He will intervene in human affairs, bring the Kingdom of God to earth and begin to call all humanity to repentance.

The book opens with seven letters to seven churches which are both literal historical churches of the time of the Apostle John as well as being symbolic for seven eras of the Church of God from the time of John through to the return of Jesus Christ. These letters give us a better feel for God’s feelings toward His church over the centuries.

Jesus in these letters does hand out some criticism in most of these letters but He shows us a very important point of the art of criticism which I call the sandwich effect. Jesus started off by praising them and telling them some of their good points. Then he offered the constructive criticism that they needed to apply to be in His kingdom before He finished off with giving them a fantastic incentive to apply the criticism - "to he who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne". It's like a sandwich in that you
start off with something positive then offer the criticism then cap it off with something positive again. You can get away with many expressions of anger if you balance them with lots of expressions of love.

In Revelation 5:6 we read: "And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth." The Father never forgets what His Son had to go through as the Passover Lamb to die for our sins.

In Revelation 6:7-8 we read: "When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth." Can you imagine how much God will hurt to see such tremendous death all over the earth?

In Revelation 6:17 we read: "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" God's anger has built up to where He must in full fury punish man for His good to bring them to repentance. When you think of all the horrible things and brutal, callous atrocities that go on every day all over the earth the Day of the Lord is the point when this all gets to God so completely that He must in full fury punish those who refuse to repent of these atrocities.

In Revelation 18:20 we read: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!" There is great joy here in the vengeance that is taken on Babylon the Great for this means that God is finally triumphant here on earth and the world will no longer be deceived by this great false political and religious system.

In Revelation 19 we read about the great joy as Christ returns when the great marriage feast of Christ and the church occurs.

"Then a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!' And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.' And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write: ‘Blessed [Happy] are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'’ (verses 5-9).

I'd like to now quote from a short article by Stephen Collins that he wrote entitled "Your First Day in the Kingdom". It paints an absolutely amazing picture of what it will be like soon after the first resurrection when Christ returns. He writes:

You made it! You have been in the kingdom of God for one day, and it has been so full of incredible and exciting events that you now take a moment to reflect on what you have just experienced since being made part of God's family.

Just as the Bible had predicted, it had occurred in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:52). Suddenly, you were a spirit being and no longer constrained with the problems, limitations, and frailties of human life and nature. Everyone's eyes were immediately riveted on the glorious central figure of Jesus Christ himself. There was eagerness on the part of all to personally speak with their Saviour, and heap their praise and thankfulness on him.

All those years in your human life when you would have given anything for even a word from Him built up such an anticipation for this moments you thrilled to find...
out that his anticipation to meet with you on His level was even greater (Luke 12:2, Revelation 4:11) as he had created you to come to this moment!

You had waited a few human years for that meeting; whereas, he had waited billions of 'years' for you, so many that the time span stretched into an infinity that you could not grasp with a human mind.

Quickly you had shared the incredible exultation and glory of this moment with your friends, the fellow saints, who were also now spiritual instead of physical. You had met friends who had died years ago, and you mutually experienced the joy of renewing your relationship with the knowledge it would never again be broken by death or any other circumstance.

In fact, all who had died in the faith were eager to catch up on the history of what had happened since they died, and those who had lived after then were just as happy to share it with them. Those saints who had lived in earlier ages were flabbergasted to learn about the explosion in knowledge (Daniel 12:4) which had occurred since their deaths and the technological growth that had resulted. They were just as shocked to realise how totally corrupt the world had gotten in the years just before Christ's return.

There had been a war to wage, which was very short and totally victorious, of course (Revelation 19:11-21). You not only had witnessed it, but had participated in it. Satan and all his lawless angels were bound shortly after that (Revelation 20:1-3), and the relief of that act was felt all over both heaven and earth.

You remember the moment you met the angels who had protected and ministered to you during your physical life (Matthew 18:10, Psalm 34:7). They were so eager to share the experiences they had in serving you then. Over the years, they had developed an affinity for you, and their desire to be of assistance to you took on a whole new meaning now that you were a spiritual Son of God.

There had been the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9) in which Christ fulfilled the words of Matthew 26:29, and once again drank wine with his disciples and brethren. It was a very special moment when he particularly called for and toasted those brethren who had been with him at the very first Lord's Supper at which he uttered those words. The banquet had been awesome, and you had previously had no idea that anything could possibly taste or smell so good. The joy of sharing it with so many old friends, and also with so many new ones from all ages of mankind's history was beyond words! Such different backgrounds, yet you all were sharing it through the oneness of God's spirit (John 17:21).

Those who had physical children on the earth had visited with them to give them glimpses of their God-given glory, and had tried to express to them what an awesome experience it was to be in the Kingdom of God. Those children had been left with a remarkable foretaste of what they had to look forward to!

Now you understand what life is REALLY supposed to be like. Human life was so limited compared to what you now experience that you marvel you were ever so limited and frail. You now comprehend what Christ said in Matthew 19:17 when he said, "If you will enter into life, keep the commandments". The human experience was so pale compared to this that you understand why Christ did not refer to it as real "life". Now you experience what it is like to no longer be bound by time and space, and yet have perfect love and self-control in all you do.
All the above experiences were wonderful, but the experience which overwhelmed all others in scope and majesty was the coronation ceremony of the saints which was foretold in 2 Timothy 4:8 and Revelation 20:4. The entire universe had waited so long for this event the coronation and welcoming of the NEW members of the GOD FAMILY! You will recall it vividly for all eternity. Even as Christ was crowned before the Father and given His authority, so was each of the saints individually and personally presented before the throne of God (Jude 24), and given their reward.

The atmosphere had been charged with electricity, and the scene was exactly as revealed by the Bible. The Father, YOUR FATHER, was on the throne (Revelation 4:2-3), at His right hand was Jesus Christ (Romans 8:34), the twenty four elders were around the throne (Revelation 4:4), the four living creatures were there (Revelation 4:6-8, Ezekiel 1:5-11), as were an innumerable company of angels (Revelation 5:11). Stretched out before the throne was a seemingly endless sea of glass like crystal (Revelation 4:6), and flashes of lightning and peals of thunder periodically proceeded forth from the throne of God (Revelation 4:5). This was not like thunder and lightning on earth but more comparable to displays and reverberations of LIVING, UNLIMITED, CONTROLLED POWER!

As each of God's new sons come forth, their works and sufferings for the purpose of Christ were proclaimed to the entire assemblage as trumpets sounded fanfares and voices of angels shouted as each new Son of God was crowned. You had seen the patriarchs of the Bible crowned before your eyes! As the ceremony continues, individuals you know are called forth and some that you thought were lowly and obscure in human life are given great rewards by God; the reverse also being true (Matthew 19:30). In all cases, regardless of the reward, each new Son is delighted with their reward and delights in everyone else's respective award.

Finally, it is your turn, A hush falls over the assembly, and Christ Himself is calling you to the very throne of God! As you respond, a spine-chilling fanfare of trumpets sounds, shouts of acclamation are ringing in your ears, and you see the beam of loving approval, affection and pride in the Father's eyes as you approach. Christ Himself presents you to the Father with rejoicing (Jude 24), and you are accepted by the Father Himself!

Christ turns to the entire family of God and the assembled angels and proclaims your deeds of righteousness, the sufferings you endured, and the service God's Spirit performed in you. You marvel as you learn that some of the darkest times in your life were the greatest in God's eyes! Some things which you thought were of little significance are given great importance. Nothing is left out, deeds tall and great (Matthew 10:40-42). You further marvel as you realize your entire life's drama was catalogued and recorded for this event (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Christ then turns to you and you are given a white stone with a new name written on it which no one knows, except you and Jesus Christ (Revelation 2:17), symbolising the unique and special relationship you will have with your Saviour for all eternity! Other names are given you (Revelation 3:12) by which you will be known to the rest of the family of God. You are now clothed in white raiment, glorious and brilliant, and Christ summons an angel who brings forth a crown, more glorious and beautiful than anything you can remember. You realise it is for YOU! The crown is designed to represent both you and the particular rulership you are being given.
You kneel before Jesus Christ, the very being who died for you and made all this possible, and as He places the crown on your head, you see the scars in His hands and the realisation of what He went through for you becomes very, very personal. You remember the stone in your hand with your personal name on it, and a bond is sealed between you and Jesus Christ which will last an eternity. You marvel how your responsibility of rulership is so uniquely designed for you, or is it that you were uniquely designed for the responsibility now given you.

You rise a crowned Son of God, and with the shouts of joy and welcoming ringing in your ears, you return to your position to witness the remainder of the ceremony, knowing that each other individual is experiencing the same kind of personal feelings about their crowning as you did.

As the ceremony ends the entire newly-crowned assembly of the Sons of God follows Jesus Christ to begin their collective and individual responsibilities in the Kingdom of God. You now realise that purpose is far greater than healing the earth and its environment, and caring for human needs. The overriding purpose is to prepare and assist all other humans now alive or ever shall be alive or resurrected to come to repentance and to Jesus Christ so that they, like you, can have their personal coronation ceremony as you have just had. You are absolutely determined that none will miss out of what you are now experiencing, and you realise it is the same determination with which God the Father and Jesus Christ were determined to bring you into the Kingdom of God.

You realise that this first day in the Kingdom of God was a 'day' only in the sense that it has all occurred during one revolution of the earth on its axis, and was perceived as a day only by those on earth. For you are no longer bound by time, and marvel that you were ever so limited. It has been so joyful and the inner sense of peace you have is beyond words. You recall Romans 8:18 which stated "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us". It has been so indescribably wonderful, and it has only been the first "day". The rest of eternity is still before you and things can only get better!!!

The only thing here that I might disagree with is that the wedding feast of Christ and the Church occurs on the same day that Christ returns. While this is possible, I tend to think that it will be a little while later just as there is an interim time between when a president is elected and when he is sworn in at the inauguration ceremony. Just as the old covenant “wedding” of Christ and Israel at Mt Sinai occurred at Pentecost when the Law was given perhaps the future new covenant wedding of Christ and the Church might also occur on the Feast of Pentecost.

Revelation 20:4-6 speaks about the blessing of the first resurrection as well as the thousand years or millennium when Jesus Christ will rule the world with the saints after His second coming. Imagine God’s great joy at being able to actively rule all the earth through Jesus Christ and bring all mankind to repentance rather than just the few He is preparing ahead of time in the church today.

After the millennium we come to the Great White Throne Judgment period when all who have died without knowing Christ will be resurrected. Imagine the joy of seeing old family members again who have since passed away. How moving will it be to see your loved ones once again who weren’t in the church? For mothers to see children who died in their arms, for husbands who lost their wives and for children who’s mums and dads died when they were very young? It will be an incredibly moving time.

Ultimately we’ve got to stoop down and help and serve and bring into eternal life every human being who’s ever lived from power-hungry dictators to starving kids on the streets of Calcutta in the World...
Tomorrow. Talk about an awesome challenge on our hands! Just think of the incredible transformation to take a starving kid in Calcutta or a primitive from Papua New Guinea or a pygmy in Africa, teach them God’s ways and for them to become a member in the God family sharing all the power and glory that God has.

Imagine what it will be like to have all the great artists and musicians using their talents in a completely godly way and all together on the earth at the same time. What art and music would they create? Imagine the great musicians doing special music like Elvis or the many rock bands of today. What famous people of history would you like to meet?

Will the earth fit all the billions at that time. Let’s say God makes 60% of the earth’s surface land in the World Tomorrow and there are approximately 60 billion people that means there would be, on average, a spacious 5 acres for every family of four.

In Revelation 20 we read about Satan being put away and later being condemned to the lake of fire. Imagine the sadness God will feel in having to condemn those who refuse to repent to the lake of fire – both unrepentant humans as well as Satan and the demons.

The New Jerusalem and our Incredible Human Potential

After the Great White Throne Judgment period we read in Revelation 21 and 22 about how God the Father will come and dwell with mankind on earth and bring New Jerusalem with Him which He has been preparing for just this moment.

We are told in the Book of Revelation that the New Jerusalem is absolutely massive. It is 1500 miles by 1500 miles in area and soars to an enormous height of 1500 miles!

That is absolutely incredible. To give you some idea of how big an area that would cover that is a square area from Ankara, Turkey in the top left corner down through Cyprus and the Mediterranean Sea, Cairo, down through to the Sudan in the bottom left corner and then across the southern half of Arabia to the eastern side of the Persian Gulf and up through the eastern half of Iran. That’s an area that takes in the most of the Arabian Peninsula, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, much of Iran, southern Turkey, the Sinai and everything east of the Nile River. That is an incredible area!

The New Jerusalem will literally be two thirds of the area of Australia or the area of the United States west of the Mississippi River! And it’s also a staggering 1500 miles high! That height would put its peak some five times higher than the standard orbit of the space shuttle which orbits in space about 300 miles above the earth! Can you imagine taking an elevator ride up to the penthouse suite of the New Jerusalem? That’s a pretty long trip in a standard elevator! Imagine the view of the whole earth from the balcony of the top penthouse.

The walls of the New Jerusalem will be 20 stories high or to put it in terms that young people will comprehend the walls of the New Jerusalem will be as tall as Godzilla. I guess that to God size really does matter. What does this great city look like? George Kackos makes the following comments about what the New Jerusalem will look like:

"It defies human imagination. Containing the glory of God and illuminated like a jasper stone, it glows in deep, rich, blue-green tones with the transparency of crystal. The walls have 12 gates, with the names of the tribes of Israel written upon them and 12 angels present. There are three gates in each of the four walls. The 12 foundations of the city wall contain the names of the 12 apostles (Revelation 11-14)."
"The angel who measures the city gives its dimensions in terms of the reed (12 1/2 feet). The New Jerusalem is 1,500 miles in length, breadth and height (verse 16)!. (One) possibility is that the city is shaped like a pyramid, with God the Father and Christ appearing in the apex. The pyramidal structure is unique architecturally—the design may have originally come from God Himself. Other spirit beings may occupy areas at lower heights, depending on their status. Whatever the shape, New Jerusalem is a huge city. A spectacular example of God's handiwork is that the city is made of gold that appears as clear glass (Revelation 21:18).

"The walls encompassing New Jerusalem are 216 feet high (assuming a cubit measures 18 inches - that means the walls are about 20 stories high). Supporting the walls are an array of beautiful stones. Visiting a gem dealer would help you appreciate the beauty of the jasper [green], sapphire [blue], chalcedony [green], emerald [green], sardonyx [red & white], sardius [red], chrysolite [yellow], beryl [green], topaz [greenish gold], chrysoprase [green], jacinth [bluish purple] and amethyst [purple] that are used (Revelation 21:17-20). Though hard to imagine, each gate is made from a single pearl. That's quite a contrast to the small pearls we see today. A street is described as being made of pure gold having the transparency of glass (Good News, January 1981, article: 'After the Millennium - New Heavens and a New Earth')"

In Revelation 21:1-5 we read: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'"

The earth and the heavenly order will be entirely re-decorated. Finally God the Father will come and dwell with all mankind. Up until this time no human has had any direct contact with the Father. Jesus Christ has been the mediator between the Father and mankind. Why has God the Father chosen to wait until this time to have direct contact with mankind? I suspect it is to emphasize the great lesson that sin is utterly repugnant to God and God the Father in His great holiness has chosen to wait until sin has been purged from this planet which will become the new headquarters of the universe.

God says that He wipe away every tear and that there will be no more death and sorrow. Imagine the joy of the Father being able to be with His children in a direct, personal way and the last enemy of death finally being destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Herbert W. Armstrong had a wonderfully encouraging saying about the Book of Revelation. He once said, "I've read the end of the book and in the end we win!" Mainstream Christianity would have us believe that when we die we go to heaven for all eternity playing harps or whatever, yet the Bible tells us that what God has planned for us for the rest of eternity is far more exciting! Paul describes our incredible future in these words in Romans 8:18-23:

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation [the universe] waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation [the universe] itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been
groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (NIV).

The universe is currently in a state of decay. It is running down and is eagerly awaiting our birth into God’s family so it can be set free from that decay. Once we are finished fixing up planet Earth, the whole universe with its billions and billions of stars and planets awaits us. God is in the creating business and we will join the family business of creating and beautifying the entire universe for all eternity with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

"These scriptures indicate we shall impart life to billions and billions of dead planets, as life has been imparted to this earth. We shall create, as God directs and instructs...It will be an eternal life of accomplishment, constantly looking forward in...joyous anticipation to new creative projects, and still looking back also on accomplishments with happiness and joy over what shall have been already accomplished...With God’s great master plan of seven thousand years finally completed -- the mystery of the ages finally revealed, and with the re-creating of the vast universe and eternity lying ahead, we come finally to THE BEGINNING” (Mystery of the Ages, p.296-297).

Our ultimate destiny as fully-fledged sons of God is to co-inherit and help rule and beautify the entire universe under the direction of the Father and our elder brother, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:8-10). Then we’ll have glorified spirit bodies that will not be subject to physical laws as we know them (1 Corinthians 15:42-54). We’ll be able to hurtle throughout the universe far faster than the speed of light - at the speed of thought (John 20:17, Matthew 28:9)!

In a typical two trees sermon that Herbert Armstrong gave near the end of his life he got to the end of the sermon explaining God’s plan and then he dropped what to me, at least, was a bombshell by saying after we’ve finished with this world we will go out and create new worlds and raise up new people out in the universe for all eternity. How much truth is there in this statement? A scripture that immediately leaps to my mind is Isaiah 9:7 which says, “of the INCREASE of His government and peace there will be no end.” There won’t be just no end of God’s government but no end of the increase as well.

Revelation 22:2 also tells us that the leaves of the tree of life will be for the healing of the nations. For people to be healed they must be sick. Sick people after the New Jerusalem comes to earth? Perhaps this is an indication that we might create more people who will be mortal before becoming immortal. By the end of the Great White Throne Judgment period there may be approximately 200 billion members in God’s family. If you think that’s a lot, scientists estimate there are about 400 billion billion stars in the universe. Divide the number of stars by the number of God members and you have a galaxy or two for everyone on average. God has created all these solar systems with planets on to one day be inhabited. We will be the ones to help populate those solar systems way out there.

In the movie "Contact" someone asked the question if we are all alone in the universe and the answer that was given to the question was, "If we are all alone it seems like an awful waste of space". That comment highlights why the popular concept of going to heaven when we die mocks God’s creation. If we spend all of our time in heaven when we die then the rest of the universe seems like a waste of space. The same perhaps might be said if there aren’t new generations raised up elsewhere in the universe after God’s 7000 year plan on earth is completed. Can you imagine tens of thousands of years from now if we do raise up new generations of people who have subsequently created people on other worlds and they meet those of us in the church now? They will think its an incredible privilege to meet someone who was the firstfruits on earth, the very first world!
God’s great Master plan is truly amazing and shows the profound depths of His love. A friend of mine calls this plan of salvation, where God plans to bring us lowly dust of the ground into His Family, as the “Clod to God Program”. It’s a pretty apt description. This incredible potential is being offered by God to you and me if we choose to live by His way of life, develop godly character and endure to the end! God is reproducing Himself through us and in His great love He wants to share His wonderful God level of existence with each and every of us! That is our incredible human potential!

**God Wants Our Hearts – The Sacred Romance**

Our great God has been trying to win our hearts throughout all of man’s history. He is actively trying to woo and romance us so that we will worship Him and share in His great adventure for all eternity.

One of the most outstanding books that I have ever read that has deepened my understanding of the depths of God’s amazing personality and character and that has elevated my understanding of how God works with us above the simplistic ideas we usually have is a book called “The Sacred Romance” by John Eldridge and Brent Curtis.

I’d like to quote from it at some length to help the reader gain some greater insights into the great story and Romance of the ages between God and His people and to help us to better understand how God works with us which is often different from the simplistic ideas we usually have.

God is seeking an intimate relationship with us. Religion cannot just be a life of obedience and beliefs. It has to be a way of the heart. There needs to be a depth of real emotion and feeling for the great God who longs to have a deep emotional and intimate relationship with all of us.

I quote now from “The Sacred Romance”:

**The Christian Life is a Love Affair**

Above all else, the Christian life is a love affair of the heart. It cannot be lived primarily as a set of principles or ethics. It cannot be managed with steps and programs. It cannot be lived exclusively as a moral code leading to righteousness. In response to a religious expert who asked him what he must do to obtain real life, Jesus asked a question in return: "What is written in the Law?...How do you read it?" He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live’ (Luke 10:26-28).

The truth of the gospel is intended to free us to love God and others with our whole heart. When we ignore this heart aspect of our faith and try to live out our religion solely as correct doctrine or ethics, our passion is crippled, or perverted, and the divorce of our soul from the heart purposes of God toward us is deepened.

The religious technocrats of Jesus' day confronted him with what they believed were the standards of a life pleasing to God. The external life, they argued, the life of ought and duty and service, was what mattered. "You're dead wrong," Jesus said. "In fact, you're just plain dead [whitewashed tombs]. What God cares about is the inner life, the life of the heart" (Matthew 23:25-28). Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the life of the heart is clearly God's central concern. When the people of Israel fell into a totally external life of ritual and observance, God lamented, "These people...honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13).
Our heart is the key to the Christian life. The apostle Paul informs us that hardness of heart is behind all the addictions and evils of the human race (Romans 1:21-25). Oswald Chambers writes, "It is by the heart that God is perceived [known] and not by reason...so that is what faith is: God perceived by the heart." This is why God tells us in Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." He knows that to lose heart is to lose everything. Sadly, most of us watch the oil level in our car more carefully than we watch over the life of our heart.

In one of the greatest invitations ever offered to man, Christ stood up amid the crowds in Jerusalem and said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37-38). If we aren't aware of our soul's deep thirst, his offer means nothing. But, if we will recall, it was from the longing of our hearts that most of us first responded to Jesus (p.8-9)...

C.S. Lewis knew this longing well:

..."All the things that have ever deeply possessed your soul have been but hints of it - tantalizing glimpses, promises never quite fulfilled, echoes that died away just as they caught your car. But if it should really become manifest - if there ever came an echo that did not die away but swelled into the sound itself - you would know it. Beyond all possibility of doubt you would say, 'Here at last is the thing I was made for.' We cannot tell each other about it. It is the secret signature of each soul, the incommunicable and unappeasable want, the thing we desired before we met our wives or made our friends or chose our work, and which we shall still desire on our deathbeds, when the mind no longer knows wife or friend or work. While we are, this is. If we lose this, we lose all" (p.20-21)...

The Arrows [of life] strike at the most vital places in our hearts, the things we care most about. The deepest questions we ever ask are directly related to our heart's greatest needs and the answers life gives us shape our images of ourselves, of life, and of God. Who am I? The Romance whispers that we are someone special, that our heart is good because it is made for someone good; the Arrows tell us we are a dime a dozen, worthless, even dark and twisted, dirty. Where is life to be found? The Romance tells us life will flourish when we give it away in love and heroic sacrifice. The Arrows tell us that we must arrange for what little life there may be, manipulating our world and all the while watching our backs. "God is good," the Romance tells us. "You can release the well-being of your heart to him." The Arrows strike back, "Don't ever let life out of your control," and they seem to impale with such authority, unlike the gentle urges of the Romance, that in the end we are driven to find some way to contain them. The only way seems to be to kill our longing for the Romance, much in the same way we harden our heart to someone who hurts us. If I don't want so much, we believe, I won't be so vulnerable. Instead of dealing with the Arrows, we silence the longing. That seems to be our only hope. And so we lose heart.

Which is the truer message? If we try to hang on to the Romance, what are we to do with our wounds and the awful tragedies of life? How can we keep our heart alive in the face of such deadly Arrows? Is it possible for Mike to risk opening his heart to love again? Can Sam ever totally trust the God he served for so long? How many losses can a heart take? If we deny the wounds or try to minimize them, we deny a part of our heart and end up living a shallow optimism that frequently becomes a demand that the world be better than it is. On the other hand, if we embrace the Arrows as the final word on life, we despair, which is another way to lose heart. To
lose hope has the same effect on our heart as it would be to stop breathing. If only there were someone to help us reconcile our deepest longings with our greatest fears (p.32-33)...

God is Writing a Great Story Through Our Lives

The deepest convictions of our heart are formed by stories and reside there in the images and emotions of story. As a young boy, around the time my heart began to suspect that the world was a fearful place and I was on my own to find my way through it, I read the story of a Scottish discus thrower from the nineteenth century. He lived in the days before professional trainers and developed his skills alone, in the highlands of his native village. He even made his own iron discus from the description he read in a book. What he did not know was that the discus used in competition was made of wood with an outer rim of iron. His was solid metal and weighed three or four times as much as those being used by his would-be challengers.

This committed Scotsman marked out in his field the distance of the current record throw and trained day and night to be able to match it. For nearly a year, he labored under the self-imposed burden of the extra weight. But he became very, very good. He reached the point at which he could throw his iron discus the record distance, maybe farther. He was ready. My Scotsman (I had begun to closely identify with him) traveled south to England for his first competition. When he arrived at the games, he was handed the official wooden discus which he promptly threw like a tea saucer. He set a new record, a distance so far beyond those of his competitors that no one could touch him. He thus remained the uncontested champion for many years. Something in my heart connected with this story. So, that's how you do it. **Train under a great burden and you will be so far beyond the rest of the world you will be untouchable. It became a defining image for my life, formed in and from a story.**

Life is not a list of propositions, it is a series of dramatic scenes. As Eugene Peterson said, "We five in narrative, we live in story. Existence has a story shape to it. We have a beginning and an end, we have a plot, we have characters." Story is the language of the heart. Our souls speak not in the naked facts of mathematics or the abstract propositions of systematic theology; they speak the images and emotions of story. Contrast your enthusiasm for studying a textbook with the offer to go to a movie, read a novel, or listen to the stories of someone else's life. Elie Wiesel suggests that "God created man because he loves stories." So if we're going to find the answer to the riddle of the earth - and of our own existence - we'll find it in story (p.38-40)...

The resurrection of our heart requires that the Sacred Romance be true and that is precisely what the Scriptures tell us. As Frederick Buechner reminds us in his wonderful book "Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale" the world of the gospel is the world of fairy tale, with one notable exception:

"It is a world of magic and mystery, of deep darkness and flickering starlight. It is a world where terrible things happen and wonderful things too. It is a world where goodness is pitted against evil, love against hate, order against chaos, in a great struggle where often it is hard to be sure who belongs to which side because appearances are endlessly deceptive.
Yet for all its confusion and wildness, it is a world where the battle goes ultimately to the good, who live happily ever after, and where in the long run everybody, good and evil alike, becomes known by his true name...That is the fairy tale of the Gospel with, of course, one crucial difference from all other fairy tales, which is that the claim made for it is that it is true, that it not only happened once upon a time but has kept on happening ever since and is happening still" (p.46)...

The Struggle We Have With Believing That God Is Indifferent

Embedded in our stories, deep down in our heart, in a place so well guarded that they have rarely if ever been exposed to the light of day, are other grief-laden and often angry questions: "God, why did you allow this to happen to me? Why did you make me like this? What will you allow to happen next?" In the secret places of our heart, we believe God is the One who did not protect us from these things or even the One who perpetrated them upon us. Our questions about him make us begin to live with a deep apprehension that clings anxiously to the depths of our hearts. "Do you really care for me, God?"

This is the question that has shipwrecked many of our hearts, leaving them grounded on reefs of pain and doubt, no longer free to accompany us on spiritual pilgrimage. We might be able to rationalize away that question by telling ourselves that we need to be more careful, or that sometimes others are just bad. We can even breathe a sigh of relief when we realize that trouble has come from our own sin. But even the careful, legalistic, and constricted lifestyle that arises out of thinking we can avoid trouble through our own devices shipwrecks when the Arrows seem to strike us out of nowhere. What are we to make of God's wildness in allowing these things to happen?

Indeed, the things that have happened to us often suggest that the real script of the play we're all living in is "God is indifferent" rather than "God is love." Deep down in our heart, in the place where the story is formed, this experience of God as indifferent drives us to write our own scripts. Job apparently lived with this anxiety about God even before his tribulations descended upon him, as evidenced by his exclamation from the ashes of his home and his life: "What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me" (Job 3:25) (p.49-50)...

The cultures in the cradle of civilization lived with a pantheon of gods who themselves existed in a kind of hierarchy. There were gods of war, fertility, and harvest who were acknowledged by the culture as a whole, and under these, a litany of household gods, usually statues made of crafted wood, clay, and precious metals, that were placed on the family mantel. People related to each of these gods by means of specific rituals and ceremonies whereby their protection and favor could be gained. Each family literally "owned" their own god.

To use an illustration from our culture, these household gods were somewhat like having a mobster for a neighbor. To those outside the neighborhood, the mobster may seem fearful and somewhat sinister. But if you’re his immediate neighbor and treat him with deference and respect, he may get you a good deal on aluminum siding or a new car. Or he might have a bag of dead cats deposited on the doorstep of the man down the street, who, you casually mentioned, was allowing his dog to dig in your flower beds.
When the living God of the Old Testament came along, he seemed to fit right in with this way of thinking, describing himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He gave Moses a regimen of laws, rituals, and ceremonies to be followed if the Israelites were to gain his favor. Everything should have worked out fine. The familiar household-god religion was very simple and well understood by everyone: Simply obey the prescribed rules, regulations, and rituals that the god thought were important, for whatever reason, and he would be appeased and give his blessing. The Israelites never bothered to read between the lines. They were totally unprepared and unwilling to consider the thought that they, like Job, were involved in a much bigger drama.

Indeed, when we consider how central a part Job was given in the drama God was directing, we are confronted with the reality that we, too, could be in the same position. It seems that the part God has written for us is much too big and certainly too dangerous. Paul confirms this thought in Ephesians when he tells us, "The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence" (Ephesians 1:22-23, the Message). Every human being is of great significance to God, but those whom God has drawn to believe in him are center stage in a drama of cosmic proportions.

When we look at Job's time on center stage, we find that God not only allows the Prince of Darkness to come before his throne, he points Job out to him and, in effect, unleashes him on the defenseless man. This is very much akin to a policeman drawing the attention of a gang of thugs to a young man walking lawfully along the street with his wife, children, and belongings. He then gives the gangsters permission to test the man's respect for the law by mugging and robbing him, and killing his children. I find myself asking, "Was this really necessary to test Job's heart? What's going on here anyway?" I want to ask, "If God is the author, producer, and director of this play, what kind of a story is He telling?"

I am filled with not a little outrage as well as a anxiety that wants to ask for a much smaller part in the play than Job had; or possibly even a role in a more off-Broadway production that I could help direct. You know, something like God Helps Brent Pursue Money, Wealth, and Fame While Living a Quiet Life. There is something frightening about being in a play in which the director may allow the plot to descend on my character from a totally unknown direction, a direction that may cause me deep emotional or even physical harm. It is something like having the stage lights dropped from high overhead during one of my scenes without telling me, leaving me no chance to change my mark before they fall.

God's artistry as Playwright of the story we find ourselves living in often seems to use up characters like trailer courts in tornado season. He assures us, notably in the Psalms, that He sees our pain and cares for us, and that our tormentors will be judged, but He still calls us firmly to our marks, regardless of disease, calamity, age, sex, or strength.

He comes to Job in the midst of his loss, pain, and indeed the nearness of death and says, referring to the ongoing discussion between Job and his friends, "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me" (Job 38:2-3).

This is followed by his lengthy interrogation of Job's understanding of even the physical creation, much less any more profound issues. I must admit there is
something in me as a man that feels strangely respected by this approach while another part of me thinks how unfeeling and cold.

When God comes to call Jeremiah to be his prophet of hard sayings to Judah, Jeremiah protests, saying, "Ah, Sovereign LORD...I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.' But the LORD said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 1:6-8).

God is saying that these things will be done through Jeremiah’s dependence on His strength and provision, and that He will rescue Him. Yet there is something about God’s rescues that make them a little less timely than dialing 911. He leaves Abraham with his knife raised and ready to plunge into Isaac's heart, and Isaac waiting for the knife to descend; he leaves Joseph languishing for years in an Egyptian prison; he allows the Israelites to suffer four hundred years of bondage under the Egyptians and leaves those same Israelites backed against the Red Sea with Pharaoh’s chariots thundering down on them. He abandons Jesus to the cross and does not rescue Him at all. And then there are those of us who, along with the saints under heaven’s very altar, are groaning under the weight of things gone wrong, waiting for that same Jesus to return and sweep us up with Him in power and glory. "How long, O Lord?" we whisper in our weariness and pain.

Indeed, God calls us to battles where the deck appears stacked in favor of those who are his enemies and ours, just to increase the drama of the play. And there is the clear picture, even from God himself, that he does so to enhance his own glory (p.52-55)...

We would like to picture goodness as being synonymous with safety. When we think of God being good, we perhaps picture someone like Al on the popular TV program, Home Improvement. He is someone who carefully plans out each task ahead of time and has all the proper tools and safety equipment in place; someone who has thought out every possible danger ahead of time and made allowances to ensure our safety as his workmate; someone who goes to bed early, gets plenty of rest, and wears flannel shirts as a mark of his reliability.

God’s Goodness is Not Synonymous With Comfort and Safety

Being in partnership with God, though, often feels much more like being Mel Gibson’s sidekick in the movie Lethal Weapon. In his determination to deal with the bad guy, he leaps from seventh-story balconies into swimming pools, surprised that we would have any hesitation in following after him. Like Indiana Jones’ love interests in the movies, we find ourselves caught up in an adventure of heroic proportions with a God who both seduces us with his boldness and energy and repels us with His willingness to place us in mortal danger, suspended over pits of snakes...

Indeed, one of Satan’s most powerful whisperings to us is that we are expendable. We may admit that we are part of God’s plan for His own glory but only in the same way Napoleon used his soldiers to establish his empire.

When the going got rough in the Russian winter campaign, Napoleon hightailed it back to Paris in his carriage, leaving Marshall Ney and the remnants of the once Grand Army to make it back the best way they could. At one point in the long, arduous campaign of delivering to Judah the bad news of coming judgment and
futile calls for repentance, Jeremiah explodes with thoughts that have apparently been building in him for a while with regard to God’s use of him:

"O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot" (Jeremiah 20:7-9 NIV).

Jeremiah complains that not only has God written a play that casts him in a devastating role, but that he has also placed a fire in his heart that will not let him leave the play even if he wants to. And there is this fire in all of us, felt as a desire for intimacy and a hunger for meaning, that we must literally kill if we want to escape the play.

To all of these charges, God is unrepentant, even as he was with Job. His response to these things is basically along the lines of, "I am who I am, I do what I do. I am good. What are you going to do with me?" Ironically, at the end of his interrogation by God, Job picks himself up and repents. He goes away with a sense of "Oh, now I get it. I was foolish to have lost perspective." God turns to Job's friends, who have been expounding the standard household-god formula to Job, "If you don't sin, things will go well [i.e., you can control your destiny]" - and tells them quite plainly they know nothing about Him. He tells them He will have his friend Job pray for them (p.57-59)...

Genesis gives us an in-depth account of God using both crippling and blessing over the years of the patriarch Jacob's life to show him that his salvation and hope were in a more redemptive story than his own cleverness and manipulation could create; one that God was authoring. This is not the way we often see it, though. In our experience, it feels more as if God just allows bad things to happen to us out of indifference or malice. There is a fascinating illustration of a modern-day Jacob, a man trying to find redemption in a smaller story, along with God’s fierce determination to disrupt and entice him back into the larger play, in the popular movie Forrest Gump.

Forrest is a likable man of borderline intelligence who grew up struggling with leg braces due to polio and all of the cruel tauntings that those who are different often suffer. He is thrown into seemingly random scenes in American history much like the white feather that drifts with the wind throughout the movie. He finds himself in Vietnam under the leadership of Lieutenant Dan, a rough but capable man, whose family has produced a long line of military heroes killed in combat. Lieutenant Dan is confident that dying with honor on the field of battle is his redemption. When he is rescued by Forrest from a firefight, his wounds require both legs to be amputated above the knee. He and Forrest, also wounded, are consigned to the same hospital ward where one night the rageful Lieutenant Dan drags Forrest from his bed. He proceeds to choke and curse him for destroying his life by saving him.

"I was supposed to die on the battlefield, Gump!" rages Lieutenant Dan. "I used to be Lieutenant Dan. Now look at me. I'm just a ... cripple."

In response, Forrest observes with poignant simplicity, "You still Lieutenant Dan," leaving him to collapse in grief and despair.
Lieutenant Dan, like all of us to one extent or another, is convinced that who he is, is inextricably tied to a self-redemptive story that alone will bring him recognition, honor, self respect - indeed, salvation. When that is taken from him, he is engulfed by shame, anger, and despair. He goes to New York City and enters into a purgatorial story of his own making, killing all desire for redemption. He lives off of his veteran's benefits in a haze of alcohol, drugs, and sex with prostitutes. When Forrest comes to see him, Lieutenant Dan relates to him that some of the other veterans at the V.A. Hospital have been telling him he should trust in Jesus. "Can you believe it, Gump?" he remarks bitterly. "They tell me that Jesus will walk with me on the streets of heaven." But Lieutenant Dan can see no larger story than the one that has been stolen from him. He continues to pursue the destruction of his soul with the same zeal with which he once pursued glory on the battlefield.

On New Year's Eve, God the Wild One disrupts him again. Lieutenant Dan has corralled Forrest into going back to his apartment with two prostitutes to ring in the New Year with hedonistic disdain. The prostitutes play the game, each of them pretending great attraction to Lieutenant Dan and Forrest. When Forrest is uncomfortable with his "date's" advances, he clumsily resists. With the play she is acting out ruined, she spits out, "What's wrong with this retard?" and begins to berate Forrest.

And here, Lieutenant Dan finds out he has not been able to totally kill his heart. He is filled with rage at this treatment of Forrest and orders both of the women to leave, prompting a barrage of derogatory epithets from them as they exit. With his heart again exposed, he is brought to the realization that he still cares. And with this realization, he is plunged into something beyond despair. The scene ends with a close-up of the death mask of his face stretched over a heart "filled" with inconsolable emptiness. But God is not through with Lieutenant Dan.

Forrest travels to the Gulf of Mexico to try his hand at captaining a shrimp boat, a plan inherited from his army buddy, Benjamin Blue, who was killed in the same firefight that took Lieutenant Dan's legs. Forrest is bringing his boat back to the dock one afternoon after another fruitless day casting for shrimp. On the dock, cigar clenched in his teeth, his wheelchair adorned with an "America - My Kind of Place" sticker is Lieutenant Dan, ready to try his hand as Forrest's first mate.

The strangeness of hope has once again provoked him to another try at self-redemption from his self-imposed hell. But once again, the Divine Disrupter thwarts his efforts. Lieutenant Dan confidently directs Forrest to where he is sure the shrimp are hiding, only to have their nets repeatedly regurgitate onto the deck a collage of old tires, license plates, leather shoes, and a clam or two. By this time, Lieutenant Dan is convinced that God is working against him somehow. He passively assents to Forrest's petitioning the Almighty for his favor as a member of the congregation of an otherwise all-black church. As Forrest sways disharmoniously with the other choir members and handles the praying, Lieutenant Dan sits in the rear of the church, violently downing whiskey and waiting for Forrest to appease this uncooperative household god that has attached himself to his life.

The ensuing days' shrimping brings no more harvest than before. With storm clouds gathering in the background, a completely frustrated and furious Lieutenant Dan rages, "Where ... is this God of yours, Gump? I wish your Jesus were here right now!" And Forrest comments to his listeners with rare irony, "It's funny Lieutenant Dan said that 'cause right then, God showed up." God sends a storm that puts the boat in mortal danger of being destroyed. Unbowed, Lieutenant Dan lashes himself to the
mast, filled with joy at this opportunity to finally have it out with his tormenter. He curses God and dares him to sink the boat. But God has another purpose for Lieutenant Dan. He allows the storm to rage until his anger is spent but does not kill him. Later, we learn that Forrest and Lieutenant Dan’s boat has been the only survivor in the entire shrimping fleet. As they once again ply the shrimping grounds, now without competition, their hoists and nets strain to release one cascading swarm of shrimp after another onto the deck of their boat.

As Forrest recounts the story of their becoming millionaires to a credulous but kind lady at a bus stop, he asks if she would like to know what happened to Lieutenant Dan. As he describes the scene to her, we see Lieutenant Dan sitting on the rail of their shrimping boat. The anger and fear so long entrenched there are gone. In their place is a kind of reflective surprise, like that of a man who has been redeemed in a most unexpected way. "Forrest," says Lieutenant Dan in a quiet, almost shy voice, "I never thanked you for saving my life." And with that, he hoists his legless body over the side. As Forrest hurries to the rail with some concern over his intentions, we see Lieutenant Dan backstroking peacefully through the water with a gentle smile on his face. As the camera moves away, we leave him swimming up the reflected gold highway of the sunset on the water, even as Forrest remarks, "I think Lieutenant Dan finally made his peace with God."

And again, we wonder. What is it that Lieutenant Dan has discovered? What healing has he received even though his legs are unrestored? So often, like Lieutenant Dan before his healing, we feel that God is not only unconcerned with our plight, but that he is actually working against us. And sometimes, we are right. The story of Lieutenant Dan is a poignant and revealing portrayal of God’s fierce intentions to use both crippling and blessing to redeem us from our self-redemptive and purgatorial stories.

Indeed, in the seventeenth chapter of Acts, Paul gives the Athenians the stunning news that every single thing in the lives of both nations and individuals is orchestrated with this sole objective that they might seek God (Acts 26-28). This revelation requires some reflection. We are used to thinking of the great movements of history, even the movements in our immediate relationships, as being impersonal, if not arbitrary. But with God, who notes the fall of every sparrow, the events of our lives are thoughtfully and thoroughly orchestrated to bring about our redemption. The days of our lives were ordered and numbered before there was one of them, says the psalmist (Psalm 139:16). And yet, the ways of his redemption often leave us trembling and fearful (p.62-66).

"Do you really care for me, God?" Can we trust this stranger who leaps out upon us? Could it be that his glory and our well-being, really are part of the same script? If only we understood his heart more clearly..

Can it possibly get any more uncertain than this? We so long for life to be better than it is. We wish the beauty and love and adventure would stay and that someone strong and kind would show us how to make the Arrows go away. We hope that God will be our hero.

Of all the people in the universe, He could stop the Arrows and arrange for just a little more blessing in our lives. He can spin the earth, change the weather, topple governments, obliterate armies, and resurrect the dead. Is it too much to ask that he intervene in our story? But He often seems aloof, almost indifferent to our plight, so entirely out of our control. Would it be any worse if there were no God? If He didn't
exist, at least we wouldn't get our hopes up. We could settle once and for all that we really are alone in the universe and get on with surviving as best we may.

This is, in fact, how many professing Christians end up living: as practical agnostics. Perhaps God will come through, perhaps be won't, so I'll be hanged if I'll live as though He had to come through. I'll hedge my bets and if He does show up, so much the better. The simple word for this is godlessness. Like a lover who's been wronged, we guard our heart against future disappointment...

As I spoke with a friend about her painful life, how reckless and unpredictable God seems, she turned and with pleading eyes asked the question we are all asking somewhere deep within: "How can I trust a lover who is so wild?" Indeed, how do we not only trust him, but love him in return? There's only one possible answer: You could love Him if you knew his heart was good. In the movie "The Last of the Mohicans" brave Nathaniel has captured the heart of the beautiful Cora. With tremendous courage and cunning, he rescues her from an ambush set by the black-hearted Magua, leader of a warring tribe. Nathaniel leads Cora, her sister, and a few other survivors to a hidden cave behind a waterfall. Just when it appears they will escape and live happily ever after, Magua and his savages discover their hideout. Once captured, the women may be spared but the men will surely be executed. With no powder for their rifles, Nathaniel's only chance is to leap from the falls; by saving himself, he will live to rescue Cora another day. One of the other men calls him a coward, accusing him of foul and selfish motives. How is Cora feeling? What looks like abandonment may not be. Her only hope in the face of such wildness lies in the goodness of Nathaniel's heart. At this point, it's all she has to go on. It's all we often have to go on too.

Does God have a good heart? In the last chapter Brent spoke of God as the Author of the story, which is how most people see him if they see him at all. And, as Hamlet said, there's the rub. When we think of God as Author, the Grand Chess Player, the Mind Behind It All, we doubt his heart (p.67-71).

**God's Story Shows His Heart Really is Good**

The Scriptures are written from the perspective that God is the hero of the story. Let's revisit the drama with the view of God as lead actor. What is His motive? How does life affect Him?

**Act I: His Eternal Heart**

All good fairy tales begin with "Once upon a time," and so it is with the truest fairy tale of all. In the beginning, which is to say, once upon a time, is used twice in the Scriptures. There is the first verse of Genesis, of course, but we cannot start there because when the curtain goes up on Genesis chapter 1, it is, actually going up on later events, the human story. We're after God's story, the drama from His perspective, so we would do better to start with the opening lines from the gospel of John, which take us back even farther to the once upon a time before time: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (John 1:1).

The story that is the Sacred Romance begins not with God alone, the Author at his desk, but God in relationship, intimacy beyond our wildest imagination, heroic intimacy... Think of your best moments of love or friendship or creative partnership, the best times with family or friends around the dinner table, your richest
conversations, the acts of simple kindness that sometimes seem like the only things that make life worth living. Like the shimmer of sunlight on a lake, these are reflections of the love that flows [between God the Father and His Son]. We long for intimacy because we are made in the image of perfect intimacy. Still, what we don’t have and may never have known is often a more powerful reminder of what ought to be. Our story begins with the hero in love. As Buechner reminds us, "God does not need the Creation in order to have something to love because within himself love happens."

And yet, what kind of love? There are selfish forms of love, relationships that create closed systems, impenetrable to outsiders. Real love creates a generous openness. Have you ever been so caught up in something that you just had to share it? When you are walking alone in the woods, something takes your breath away - a sunset, a waterfall, the simple song of a bird - and you think, "If only my beloved were here." The best things in life were meant to be shared. That is why married lovers want to increase their joy by having children. And so it is with God. "Father," Jesus says, "I want those you gave me to be with me, right where I am. I want them to be one heart and mind with us" (John 17). Overflowing with the generosity that comes from the abundance of real love, He creates us to share in the joy of this heroic intimacy...

**Act II: His Heart Betrayed**

There was another scene before ours. In Act II, there came angels. We're not given a great deal of insight into the life of angels, but we do know that God opened His heart and home to a heavenly host before us. And for the most part, they seem thrilled to be a part of things. Scripture never shows us a bored angel. Quite the contrary. We also know there was a cosmic divorce, a betrayal in the heart of the universe. Satan, then named Lucifer, turned on his Maker. He rose up against his sovereign Lord, and with him legions upon legions of angels. There was war in heaven...Believing that he should have center stage, Satan draws a multitude of angels into battle against the throne of God...

Satan mounted his rebellion through the power of one idea: God doesn't have a good heart. Though it seems almost incomprehensible, he deceived a multitude of the heavenly host by sowing the seed of doubt in their minds that God was somehow holding out on them. After the insurrection is squelched, that question lingers in the universe like smoke from a forest fire. Sure, God won, but it took force to do it. Power isn't the same thing as goodness. As the lead actor in the story, God seems generous and self-giving, but perhaps He’s just big. Maybe His motive is simply to be in charge. At the end of Act II, our hero's heart has been called into question.

**Act III: His Heart on Trial**

When the curtain goes up on the story of humanity, we see God in a flurry of breathtaking dramatic actions that we rather blandly call "creation." Remember, we're looking for the motives of His heart. Why is He doing all this? We know he already had the perfect relationship and that He has suffered a betrayal in the heart of heaven simply for the offense of sharing it. Now we see Him preparing to woo our hearts with a world that is beautiful and funny and full of adventure. Don't rush ahead to the Fall. Stay here a moment and feel God’s happiness with it all. Yosemite and Yellowstone and Maui and the Alps; mangoes and blackberries and cabernet grapes; horses and hummingbirds and rainbow trout. "The morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy" (Job 38:7 NIV).
God creates man and woman and sets them in Paradise. How long had He been planning this? Are we merely the replacement for the angels He lost, the first date He can find on the rebound. The first chapter of Ephesians gives a look into God's motives here:

"Long before he laid down earth's foundations, He had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of His love, to be made whole and holy by His love. Long, long ago He decided to adopt us into His family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure He took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of His lavish giftgiving by the hand of His beloved Son... Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, He had His eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living" (The Message).

God begins our courtship with a surprise. Taking the blindfold off, He turns us around and reveals His hand made wedding present. "Here," He says. "It's yours. Enjoy yourselves. Do you like it? Take it for a spin." A lavish gift indeed. What's He up to? Flowers, chocolates, exotic vacations, dinners at the finest restaurants - any person would feel pursued. But what are His intentions? Surprisingly, we see in the first glimpse of God's wildness the goodness of His heart - He gives us our freedom. In order for a true romance to occur, we had to be free to reject Him. In Disappointment with God, Philip Yancey reminds us that the powers of the Author aren't sufficient to win our hearts.

"Power can do everything but the most important thing: it cannot control love...In a concentration camp, the guards possess almost unlimited power. By applying force, they can make you renounce your God, curse your family, work without pay, eat human excrement, kill, and then bury your closest friend or even your own mother. All this is within their power. Only one thing is not: they cannot force you to love them. This fact may help explain why God sometimes seems shy to use His power. He created us to love him, but His most impressive displays of miracle - the kind we may secretly long for - do nothing to foster that love. As Douglas John Hall has put it, 'God's problem is not that God is not able to do certain things. God's problem is that God loves. Love complicates the life of God as it complicates every life.'"

The wildness of giving us freedom is even more staggering when we remember that God has already paid dearly for giving freedom to the angels. But because of His grand heart He goes ahead and takes the risk, an enormous, colossal risk. The reason he didn't make puppets is because he wanted lovers. Remember, he's inviting us up into a romance. Freedom is part of the explanation for the problem of evil. God is the author of some storms directly; but he is the author of the possibility of all storms in giving us freedom. And we opened Pandora's box.

Can you imagine if on your honeymoon one of you sneaked off for a rendezvous with a perfect stranger? Adam and Eve kicked off the honeymoon by sleeping with the enemy. Then comes one of the most poignant verses in all Scripture. "What is this you have done?" (Genesis 3:13). You can almost hear the shock, the pain of betrayal in God's voice. The fall of Adam and Eve mustn't be pictured as a crime like theft, but as a betrayal of love. In love God creates us for love and we give Him the back of our hand. Why? Satan gets us to side with him by sowing the seed of doubt in our first parents' minds: "God's heart really isn't good. He's holding out on you. You've got to take things into your own hands." And Paradise was lost.

Yet there was something about the heart of God that the angels and our first parents had not yet seen. Here, at the lowest point in our relationship, God announces His intention never to abandon us but to seek us out and win us back. "I will come for
you." Grace introduces a new element of God's heart. Up till this point we knew he was rich, famous, influential, even generous. Behind all that can still can hide a heart that is less than good. Grace removes all doubt.

And then the long story of God's pursuit of humanity begins. Satan wanted center stage: He wanted to be the main character, he wanted to be the point. His plan now is to ruin the Sacred Romance, to get us all caught up in our own little sociodramas by telling us that we are the point. You can see how humanity goes along with this. Cain murders Abel; Lamech threatens to murder everyone else. Humanity grows worse and worse until God says in pain, "I'm sorry I ever made them." But He doesn't give up. First with Noah, then Abraham, then Israel, we see God pursuing a people whose hearts will be for Him, with whom He can share the joy of the larger story. But their faithfulness lasts about as long as the morning dew.

How is God feeling by this point? As a person in the story, what is his heart experience? When we reach the prophets, we get a glimpse at what it feels like to be God. Reading the prophets, says Yancey, is like hearing a lovers' quarrel through the apartment wall. Eavesdrop on the argument and catch a glimpse of his heart:

I long to be gracious to you. You are precious and honored in my sight, because I love you. But you—come here, you ... you ... offspring of adulterers. You have made your bed on a high and lofty hill, forsaking me, you uncovered your bed, you climbed into it and opened it wide. You have been false to me. Yet ... I will take delight in you, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will I rejoice over you. (From Isaiah)

I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me... What fault did you find in me that you strayed so far from me? You are a swift she-camel running here and there, sniffing the wind in her craving - in her heat who can restrain her? Should I not punish them for this? Should I not avenge myself? I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with lovingkindness. What have I done to make you hate me so much? (From Jeremiah)

I will answer you according to your idols [your false lovers] in order to recapture your heart. (From Ezekiel)

Return to me and I will return to you. Yet you have said harsh things about me. You have said, "There's no pay-off in this relationship. It's not worth loving God." (From Malachi)

After this, four hundred years of silence. God doesn't call and when we do he won't answer the phone. You can almost imagine Him nursing His wounds, wondering where it all went wrong. And then...Here is Kierkegaard's version of the story:

"Suppose there was a king who loved a humble maiden. The king was like no other king. Every statesman trembled before his power. No one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all opponents. And yet this mighty king was melted by love for a humble maiden. How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his kingship tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her body in royal robes, she would surely not resist - no one dared resist him. But would she love him?

"She would say she loved him, of course, but would she truly? Or would she live with him in fear, nursing a private grief for the life she had left behind? Would she be happy at his side? How could he know? If he rode to her forest cottage in his royal
carriage, with an armed escort waving bright banners, that too would overwhelm her. He did not want a cringing subject. He wanted a lover, an equal. He wanted her to forget that he was a king and she a humble maiden and to let shared love cross the gulf between them. For it is only in love that the unequal can be made equal” (as quoted in Disappointment with God).

The king clothes himself as a beggar and renounces his throne in order to win her hand. The Incarnation, the life and the death of Jesus, answers once and for all the question, "What is God's heart toward me?" This is why Paul says in Romans 5, "Look here, at the Cross. Here is the demonstration of God's heart. At the point of our deepest betrayal, when we had run our farthest from him and gotten so lost in the woods we could never find our way home, God came and died to rescue us.” We don’t have to wait for the Incarnation to see God as a character in the story and learn something of His motives. But after the Incarnation there can be no doubt.

There is so much more to say. Jesus left to prepare our place in heaven; the Spirit has come to empower us to continue the invasion of the kingdom, which is primarily about freeing the hearts of others to live in the love of God. There is so much in our own heart that remains to be released. Our enemy has not given up yet and his target is also our heart. And what of Act IV, the coming adventures of heaven? All that is for the chapters ahead. Let’s stop here and try to bring this into focus.

What is God like? Is His heart good? We know He is the initiator from first to last. As Simon Tugwell reminds, God is the one pursuing us:

“So long as we imagine that it is we who have to look for God, we must often lose heart. But it is the other way about; He is looking for us. And so we can afford to recognize that very often we are not looking for God; far from it, we are in full flight from him, in high rebellion against him. And He knows that and has taken it into account. He has followed us into our own darkness; there where we thought finally to escape him, we run straight into his arms. So we do not have to erect a false piety for ourselves, to give us the hope of salvation. Our hope is in his determination to save us, and he will not give in.” (Prayer)

When we feel that life is finally up to us it becomes suffocating. When we are the main character, the world is so small there's barely room to move. It frees our souls to have something going on before us that involves us, had us in mind, yet doesn't depend on us or culminate in us, but invites us up into something larger. And what about the Romance and the Arrows? It wasn’t supposed to be like this. Once upon a time we lived in a garden; we lived in the place for which we were made. There were no Arrows, only beauty. Our relationships weren't tainted with fear, guardedness, manipulation, quid pro quo. Our work was rewarding; we received more than we gave. There is beauty, and we so long for it to last; we were made for the Garden. But now there is affliction also, and that is because we live East of Eden. The Arrows seem like the truest part of life, but they are not. The heart of the universe is still perfect love.

Finally, if we try to relate to God primarily as Author, we will go mad or despair - pretty much the same thing. I just can't imagine the characters of a novel affecting the author that much. He may like them, hate them, be intrigued with mapping out their development, but they don't impact him the way the people in his real life do.

He doesn't live with them as flesh-and-blood lovers. But when we see God as the Hero of the story and consider what He wants for us, we know one thing for certain:
We affect Him...It is only when we see God as the Hero...that we come to know His heart is good.

Where does that leave us? What is our role in the cosmic drama? Are we bit players, added for dramatic tension, color, comic relief? Neil Anderson has written that while "The most important belief we possess is true knowledge of who God is...The second most important belief is who we are as children of God"...

We Are His Beloved – His Lover

Helen of Troy must have really been something. Two kingdoms went to war over her; thousands of men gave up their lives so that one might have her. Hers was "the face that launched a thousand ships." Helen was the wife of Menelaus, King of Greece, in the ninth century, B.C. Their home was a peaceful Mediterranean kingdom until the arrival of Paris, Prince of Troy. Paris fell in love with Helen and, depending on the version of the story you've heard, she with him. Under the cover of night, Paris stole away with Helen and took her back to Troy. It was the beginning of the Trojan War. Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon amassed a mighty Greek army and set off in one thousand ships to lay siege on Troy, all to win Helen back.

Few have ever felt so pursued. Sometimes we wonder if we've even been noticed. Father was too busy to come to our games, or perhaps he jumped ship altogether. Mother was lost in a never-ending pile of laundry or, more recently, in her own career. We come into the world longing to be special to someone and from the start we are disappointed. It is a rare soul indeed who has been sought after for who she is - not because of what she can do, or what others can gain from her, but simply for herself (p.72-84)...

The gospel says that we, who are God's beloved, created a cosmic crisis. It says we, too, were stolen from our True Love and that He launched the greatest campaign in the history of the world to get us back. God created us for intimacy with Him. When we turned our back on him He promised to come for us. He sent personal messengers; He used beauty and affliction to recapture our hearts. After all else failed, He conceived the most daring of plans. Under the cover of night he stole into the enemy's camp incognito, the Ancient of Days disguised as a newborn. The Incarnation, as Phil Yancey reminds us, was a daring raid into enemy territory. The whole world lay under the power of the evil one and we were held in the dungeons of darkness. God risked it all to rescue us. Why? What is it that He sees in us that causes Him to act the jealous lover, to lay siege both on the kingdom of darkness and on our own idolatries as if on Troy (not to annihilate, but to win us once again for Himself). This fierce intention, this reckless ambition that shoves all conventions aside, willing literally to move heaven and earth. What does he want from us?

We've been offered many explanations. From one religious camp we're told that what God wants is obedience, or sacrifice, or adherence to the right doctrines, or morality. Those are the answers offered by conservative churches. The more therapeutic churches suggest that no, God is after our contentment, or happiness, or self-actualization, or something else along those lines. He is concerned about all these things, of course, but they are not His primary concern. What He is after is us - our laughter, our tears, our dreams, our fears, our heart of hearts. Remember His lament in Isaiah, that though His people were performing all their duties, "their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13). How few of us truly believe this. We've never been wanted for our heart, our truest self, not really, not for long. The thought that God wants our heart seems too good to be true (p.91)...
Every woman is in some way searching for or running from her beauty and every man is looking for or avoiding his strength. Why? In some deep place within, we remember what we were made to be, we carry with us the memory of gods, image-bearers walking in the Garden. So why do we flee our essence? As hard as it may be for us to see our sin, it is far harder still for us to remember our glory. The pain of the memory of our former glory is so excruciating, we would rather stay in the pigsty than return to our true home. We are like Gomer, wife of the prophet Hosea, who preferred to live in an adulterous affair rather than be restored to her true love.

Like Helen, we participated in our capture, though we were duped into it. And like Helen, our king has come for us, in spite of our unfaithfulness. If it is true that our identity comes from the impact we have on others, then our deepest and truest identity comes from the impact we’ve had on our most significant Other. Listen to the names He has given us: "No longer will they call you Deserted...They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; and you will be called Sought After" (Isaiah 62:4, 12).

In other words, we are the ones to be called Fought Over, Captured and Rescued, Pursued. It seems remarkable, incredible, too good to be true. There really is something desirable within me, something the King of the universe has moved heaven and earth to get...

The Scriptures employ a wide scale of metaphors to capture the many facets of our relationship with God. If you consider them in a sort of ascending order, there is a noticeable and breathtaking progression. Down near the bottom of the totem pole we are the clay and He the Potter. Moving up a notch, we are the sheep and He the Shepherd, which is a little better position on the food chain but hardly flattering; sheep don’t have a reputation as the most graceful and intelligent creatures in the world. Moving upward, we are the servants of the Master, which at least lets us into the house, even if we have to wipe our feet, watch our manners, and not talk too much. Most Christians never get past this point, but the ladder of metaphors is about to make a swift ascent.

God also calls us his children and himself our heavenly Father, which brings us into the possibility of real intimacy - love is not one of the things a vase and its craftsman share together, nor does a sheep truly know the heart of the shepherd, though it may enjoy the fruits of his kindness. Still, there is something missing even in the best parent-child relationship. Friendship levels the playing field in a way family never can, at least not until the kids have grown and left the house. Friendship opens a level of communion that a five-year old doesn’t know with his mother and father. And "friends" are what He calls us.

But there is still a higher and deeper level of intimacy and partnership awaiting us at the top of this metaphorical ascent. We are lovers. The courtship that began with a honeymoon in the Garden culminates in the wedding feast of the Lamb. "I will take delight in you," He says to us, "as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will I rejoice over you," so that we might say in return, "I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me"...

The bridal imagery often fails to capture a man’s heart, but consider: God is neither male nor female. Both genders together are needed to reflect His image and He transcends them both. The question every woman is asking goes something like, "Am I lovely? Do you want me?" The question every man is asking is, "Do I have
what it takes? Am I adequate?" As men and women, we want to be chosen for
different reasons, but we both want to be chosen, to be welcomed into the heart of
things, invited into the Drama to live from our heart. We both want love, the
adventure of intimacy, and this is what God's pursuit means for men and for women.

Our romance is far more ancient than the story of Helen of Troy. God has had us in
mind since before the Foundations of the World He loved us before the beginning of
time, has come for us, and now calls Us to journey toward Him, with Him, for the
consummation of our love (p.95-97)...

Our enemy is the angel Lucifer, son of the morning, one of the first and highest
angels God created. He is the antagonist in the sacred romance - the great villain. All
other villains are only a shadow of him. He is the one God gave a place of honor and
trust "among the fiery stones" of the courts of heaven and who sees God face-to-face
even to this day. He is one who spurned God's love and lost everything good through
the sin of presumption. His desire was, and still is, to possess everything that
belongs to God, including the worship of all those whom God loves. And God, as the
Author of the great Story in which we are all living, has mysteriously allowed him a
certain freedom to harass and oppress the other characters in the play, sometimes
in a severe manner (p.101)...

Satan's seduction of our heart always comes in the form of a story that offers us
greater control through knowing good and evil rather than the unknowns of
relationship...God's intention, on the other hand, is to use spiritual warfare to draw
us into deeper communion with himself. Satan's device is to isolate us and wear us
out obsessing about what he has done and what he will do next. And he is very
effective in using our particular Message of the Arrows to do it. God desires to use
the enemy's attacks to remove the obstacles between ourselves and him, to
reestablish our dependency on him as his sons and daughters in a much deeper way.
Once we understand that, the warfare we are in begins to feel totally different. It is
not really even about Satan anymore, but about communion with God and abiding in
Jesus as the source of life. The whole experience begins to feel more like a
devotional (p.111, 120)...

God is saying, "I love you and yet you betray me at the drop of a hat. I feel so much
pain. Can't you see we're made for each other? I want you to come back to me." And
Israel's answer, like that of any addict or adulterer, is: "It's no use! / I love foreign
gods, / and I must go after them" (Jeremiah 2:25).

Perhaps we can empathize with the ache God experienced as Israel's "husband"
(and ours when we are living indulgently). Having raised Israel from childhood to a
woman of grace and beauty, He astonishingly cannot win her heart from her
adulterous lovers. The living God of the universe cannot win the only one He loves,
not due to any lack on his part, but because her heart is captured by her addictions,
which is to say, her adulterous lovers.

Many of us have had the experience of not being able to bridge the distance between
ourselves and others, whether they be parents, friends, or lovers. Whether the
distance is caused by unhealed wounds or willful sin in our lover's heart - or our
own - we experience their rejection as our not "being enough" to win them. Unlike
God, we begin to think of ourselves as having a problem with self-esteem.

Whereas God became even more wild in His love for us by sending Jesus to die for
our freedom, most of us choose to both become and take on lovers that are less wild.
We give up desiring to be in a relationship of heroic proportions, where we risk rejection, and settle for being heroes and heroines in the smaller stories where we have learned we can "turn someone on" through our usefulness, cleverness, or beauty (or at least turn ourselves on with a momentary taste of transcendence).

The list of our adulterous indulgences is endless: There is the exotic dancer, the religious fanatic, the alcoholic, the adrenaline freak, the prostitute with a man, the man with a prostitute, the eloquent pastor who seduces with his words, and the woman who seduces with her body. There is the indulgent lover who never really indulges physically, but spends his life in a kind of whimsy about what is lost, like Ashley in Gone with the Wind. What these indulgent lovers have in common is the pursuit of transcendence through some gratification that is under their control.

In the religions of the Fertile Crescent, access to God (transcendence) was attempted through sexual intercourse with temple prostitutes. Perhaps, as we indulge our addictions, we are doing no less than prostituting ourselves and others in this very same way. "Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God," said G. K. Chesterton.

At first glance, those of us who live by indulgence - illicit affairs of the heart - appear to have a certain passion that is superior to those who live by anesthesia. But it is a passion that must be fed by the worship or use of the other and so it is a passion that does not leave us free to love. Indulgence leaves us empty and primed for the next round of thirst quenching in an endless cycle that Solomon described as "vanity of vanities"…

It is desire that is meant to lead us to nothing less than communion with Him. If we try to anesthetize it, we become relational islands, unavailable to those who need us; like the father who lowers his newspaper with annoyance at the family chaos going on around him, but makes no move to speak his life into it.

If we try to gain transcendence through indulgence, soon enough familiarity breeds contempt and we are driven to search for mystery elsewhere. So the man having an affair must have another and the man who is an alcoholic must drink more and more to find the window of feeling good. "There is only One Being who can satisfy the last aching abyss of the human heart, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ," said Oswald Chambers (p.134-136)...

Seeing Life in the Light of God's Goodness and His Pursuit of Us

Every great story involves a quest...Abraham left "his country, his people and his father's household" to follow the most outlandish sort of promise from a God He'd only just met, and He never came back. Jacob and his sons went to Egypt for some groceries and four hundred years later the Israel nation pulled up stakes and headed for home. Peter, Andrew, James, and John all turned on a dime one day to follow the Master, their fishing nets heaped in wet piles behind them. The Sacred Romance involves for every soul a journey of heroic proportions. And while it may require for some a change of geography, for every soul it means a journey of the heart...

We've met the main players in the Sacred Romance and gotten to know something of their true identities, their motives, and their roles in the story. Let's come back now to the daily grind of our own experience to answer the question, "What does all this look like in real life?" How is God wooing us through flat tires, bounced checks,
and rained-out picnics? What is He after as we face cancer, sexual struggles, and abandonment? Does knowing that we are His Beloved make any difference at all? Would recognizing Satan's temptations and our less-wild lovers help us to live as freer men and women? What difference does all this make, anyhow? The short answer is, it gives us a way of seeing that reveals life for the romantic journey it truly is.

Entering into the Sacred Romance begins with eyes to see and ears to hear. Where would we be today if Eve had looked at the serpent with different eyes, if she had seen at once that the beautiful creature with the charming voice and the reasonable proposition was in fact a fallen angel bent on the annihilation of the human race? Failure to see things as they truly are resulted in unspeakable tragedy. From that point on, the theme of blindness runs throughout Scripture. It's not merely a matter of failing to recognize temptation when we meet it; like Elisha's servant, we often fail to see the drama of redemption as well. As prophet to Israel, Elisha proved to be a major military liability for the Aramaeans. Every time these enemies of Israel planned an ambush, the man of God spoiled their fun by betraying their position to the otherwise unsuspecting people of God. Furious, the king of Aram decided to take out Israel's "radar" by killing Elisha. He learned where the prophet was holed up and sent an army to surround the city. The drama unfolds through the eyes of Elisha's servant:

"When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. 'Oh, my lord, what shall we do?' the servant asked.

"'Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.'

"And Elisha prayed, 'O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.'

"Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:15-17).

Needless to say, Elisha's servant suddenly saw from a whole different perspective. I think it's safe to assume he also experienced a bit of emotional relief - a recovery of heart. What for him had undoubtedly been a harrowing encounter became an exciting adventure.

The apostle Paul experienced an even greater surprise on the road to Damascus. Thinking he was doing God a favor, he was hell-bent on crushing a tiny religious movement called the Way. But he had the plot and the characters completely confused. Paul, known at that time as Saul, was playing the role of Defender of the Faith, when in fact he was Persecutor of Christ. It took a bout of blindness to bring things into focus, and when the scales fell from his eyes he never saw things the same way again. Paul later explained to the Romans that human sin and suffering are the result of foolish and darkened hearts, brought on by a refusal to see the Sacred Romance. It should come as no surprise that his most fervent prayer for the saints was that the scales would fall from the eyes of our heart so that we might not miss the Sacred Romance (Ephesians 1:18-19).

Several years ago I went through one of the most painful trials of my professional life. The story involves a colleague whom I will call Dave, a man I hired and with whom I had labored several years in ministry. We spent many hours on the road
together, speaking to churches about the Christian life. A point came when I needed
to confront Dave about some issues in his life that were hurting his own ministry
and the larger purposes of our team. In all fairness, I think I handled it poorly, but I
was totally unprepared for what happened next. Dave turned on me with the
ferocity of a cornered animal. He fabricated lies and spread rumors in an attempt to
destroy my career. His actions were so out of proportion it was hard to believe we
were reacting to the same events. He went to the head pastor in an attempt to have
me dismissed. The attempt failed, but our friendship was lost and several others
were hurt in the process.

In the midst of the crisis, I spoke with Brent one afternoon about the turn of events
and the awful pain of betrayal. He said "I wonder what God is up to in all this?"

"God?" I said. "What's He got to do with it?" My practical agnosticism was revealed. I
was caught up in the sociodrama, the smaller story, completely blind to the true
story at that point in my life.

Brent's question arrested my attention and brought it to a higher level. In fact, the
process of our sanctification, our journey, rests entirely on our ability to see life
from the basis of that question. As the poet William Blake warned long ago, "Life's
dim window of the soul distorts the heavens from pole to pole, and leads you to
believe a lie, when you see with, not through, the eye."

Allow me, then, to review what we have encountered. First, our lives are not a
random series of events; they tell a Story that has meaning. We aren't in a movie
we've arrived at twenty minutes late; we are in a Sacred Romance. There really is
something wonderful that draws our heart; we are being wooed. But there is also
something fearful. We face an enemy with vile intentions. Is anyone in charge?
Someone strong and kind who notices us? At some point we have all answered that
question "no" and gone on to live in a smaller story. But the answer is "yes" - there is
someone strong and kind who notices us. Our Story is written by God who is more
than author, He is the romantic lead in our personal dramas. He created us for
Himself and now He is moving heaven and earth to restore us to His side. His
wooing seems wild because He seeks to free our heart from the attachments and
addictions we've chosen thanks to the Arrows we've known.

And we - who are we, really? We are not pond scum, nor are we the lead in the story.
We are the Beloved; our hearts are the most important thing about us and our
desire is wild because it is made for a wild God. We are the Beloved, and we are
addicted. We've either given our heart to other lovers and can't get out of the
relationships, or we've tried our best to kill desire (often with the help of others)
and live lives of safe, orderly control. Either way, we play into the hands of the one
who hates us. Satan is the mortal enemy of God and therefore ours as well. who
comes with offers of less-wild lovers, hoping to deceive us in order to destroy our
heart and thus prevent our salvation or cripple our sanctification. These are the
stage, the characters, and the plot in the broadest possible terms. Where do we go
from here?

We are faced with a decision that grows with urgency each passing day: Will we
leave our small stories behind and venture forth to follow our Beloved into the
Sacred Romance? The choice to become a pilgrim of the heart can happen any day
and we can begin our journey from any place. We are here, the time is now, and the
Romance is always unfolding. The choice before us is not to make it happen. As
Chesterton said, "An adventure is, by its nature, a thing that comes to us. It is a thing
that chooses us, not a thing that we choose." Lucy wasn't looking for Narnia when she found it on the other side of the wardrobe; in a way, it found her. Abraham wasn't wandering about looking for the one true God; he showed up with an extraordinary invitation. But having had their encounters, both could have chosen otherwise. Lucy could have shut the wardrobe door and never mentioned what had happened there. Abraham could have opted for life in Haran. The choice before us is a choice to enter in.

So much of the journey forward involves a letting go of all that once brought us life. We turn away from the familiar abiding places of the heart, the false selves we have lived out, the strengths we have used to make a place for ourselves and all our false loves, and we venture forth in our hearts to trace the steps of the One who said, "Follow me" ...

**The Dragons and Nits of Life**

Pretending that life is easier and more blessed than it really is hinders our ability to walk with God and share Him with others. Faith is not the same thing as denial. Blessings come, to be sure. But they tend to be infrequent, unpredictable, and transient. In the day-to-day pattern of things, our journey is shaped more often by dragons and nits - crises that shake us to the core and persistent troubles that threaten to nag us to death. Dragons and nits: Are they tragic events and random inconveniences, or are they part of the plot through which God redeems our heart in very personal ways?

Mary is a good friend of mine who lost her permanent front teeth through an accident in early adolescence. Years later, she struggled to finally resolve the issue with dental caps. What should have been a simple procedure took weeks, then months. Appointment after appointment, the caps were either the wrong color, the wrong shape, or the wrong size. When she finally did get a pair that she could live with, the glue didn't hold.

Where was the Sacred Romance in such a mundane and yet withering struggle? Why didn't God ride in as hero and provide a beautiful set of caps? Wouldn't that have been the loving thing to do? As the ordeal continued, a major issue of her heart surfaced. Mary's teeth had long been for her a symbol of her struggle with the question of her inner beauty. Her teeth were a source of shameful arrows lodged deep. A seemingly irrelevant nit that God refused to take away became an opportunity to face a fundamental question the heart of every woman asks: Am I lovely? Without the nit, the deeper issue of her heart would never have come up. Once it did, the real battle began.

The Accuser stepped in with a subtle, deadly stream of thoughts: "Look, just settle for the wrong caps and get on with your life. Your desire for beauty is nothing more than vanity. Things will never change. God doesn't care for your heart or He would have taken care of your teeth." And finally, "This is who you really are: unlovely and unlovable."

Each time Mary looked in the mirror, these sentences urged her to lose heart. Some days, the crisis felt as if it would crush her spirit; on other days, she just felt dumb.

Meanwhile, Mary's false lovers took their cue and began offering to help her deal with the pain. Food promised to take away her heartache; busyness lured her to bury it beneath a deluge of Christian service. Even the faith practiced by the
charismatic church she attends offered to lift her beyond the struggle if she would only focus on the Lord and worship more frequently.

Thankfully, her True Love was persistent in his pursuit of her heart, refusing to let her take the easy way out. The question of her inner beauty broke to the surface one day, and, fortunately, a friend with eyes for the Romance was there to help her see what was at stake.

Once Mary finally turned and faced the core issue, God was able to speak words of loving reassurance: "You are lovely, Mary, and I want you to offer your inner beauty, your womanly heart to the world." Through a seemingly insignificant and unspiritual issue like dental caps, God spoke healing to Mary's heart and invited her up into the Sacred Romance.

If we'll take time to reflect, the nits of our lives and the way we typically respond to them both have a theme, a pattern that reveals something important about our heart, something God is after. Mary's theme was the suppression of her beauty under more spiritual distractions." Satan tempts us toward cynicism, resignation, and an offer of a safer or even a more exciting life if we will simply renounce our True Love and follow him.

The dragons are far more dramatic. The doctor announces he's found a lump; your spouse announces she is no longer in love with you. They are dragons because they strike at the core of our deepest fears. This is the dark night of the soul, when we face the implications of Job's question: God could stop this. Why doesn't he? Satan leaps in with a reaffirmation of the first temptation: "God isn't really your kind advocate after all." We're faced with a choice to fall back, clutch up, seize control, or enter more deeply into our lives and our beliefs and release more thoroughly to the love of God.

"I'll never have the love I want." The sentence rose up from some deep place within me as I lay in bed one morning, looking for a reason to get up. My wife, Stasi, and I had been going through one of the hardest times we'd ever encountered in our marriage. Some days we both wondered if we would even make it; other days we wondered if we even wanted to. The wounds were too deep, the barriers too high; it just didn't seem worth the effort. Divorce seemed like a perfectly reasonable way out.

Beneath the anger and the disappointment lurked a far more defining issue of my heart. Years ago, when my father checked out of my life into alcoholism, an Arrow lodged deep within: You are on your own. In order to control that Arrow I made a resolution in my heart: I won't need anyone, not deeply. I can make it without love. But as the years rolled by, my heart refused to live in my self-created isolation. I looked for someone to fill the void in my life left by my father. I chose Stasi as the lucky girl. Beneath the stated marriage vows of "for better or for worse," what I was really saying was, "Stasi, I'm going to give you the opportunity of a lifetime. No one has ever really loved me the way I so desperately want to be loved, but I'm going to give you that chance. It lies in your power to validate my soul."

The pressure is more than any human being can bear. Even if she were a perfect woman, Stasi could never come through. But like all of us, she came into marriage with a set of demons all her own. Though she didn't face something as awful as alcoholism, her struggles seemed to me a terrible repeat of my father's because I felt the effect to be the same: I felt alone. Smelling blood, Satan closed in like a shark
with suggestions like, "You don't have to put up with this, you know. There are options, other women. Besides, things will never change with Stasi." I turned to my false loves, losing myself in my career and spending my free time escaping through fly-fishing. I prayed that God would simply take away the trials in our marriage, but He didn't. I tried to live beyond my longing to be loved, but I couldn't. The stakes were incredibly high: a loss of heart, of our marriage, and the perpetuation of the family curse onto our boys.

There, in the wee hours of the morning, when our heart has the chance to catch us with its most honest thoughts, the sentence rose from the depths of my soul: I'll never have the love I want. The aching wound from years before was present to me again. And there God was able to begin to waken me to the Romance. Browsing through Scripture I read 1 John 4:7, a simple sentence, one I had probably read a thousand times before: "Love comes from God." It brought more hope than I had ever known. It spoke to the wound because the wound was awakened and I was ready to hear. As the weeks progressed, I embraced my longing to be loved and turned the validation of my soul over to my Father in heaven. Sometime later, while on a business flight to the West Coast, I was thinking about love and those words from I John. A new sentence arose in my heart: I have the love I wanted all my life.

Both dragons and nits take us into the deep places of the soul, uncovering the sentences we have long lived by. It was in the depths of his personal tragedies that Job uttered the ruling sentence of his heart: "What I feared has come upon me" (Job 3:25). In other words, "I knew it! I knew I couldn't really trust God - not with the things that matter most." Job's idol was control and God was determined to save him from it. When the nits and dragons come, we ask God to remove them and when He doesn't, we take charge of our own well-being since it appears no one else will. The dragons and nits reveal to us (and to our community) where our attachments and addictions lie. In other words, they reveal where our heart is, other than captured by the love of God.

But there is more. Life on the road takes us into our heart, for only when we are present in the deep sentences can God speak to them. That's why the story is a journey; it has to be lived, it cannot simply be talked about. When we face trials, our most common reaction is to ask God, "Why won't you relieve us?" And when He doesn't, we resignedly ask, "What do you want me to do?" Now we have a new question: "Where is the Romance headed?"

There is another great "revealing" in our life on the road. We run our race, we travel our journey, in the words of Hebrews, before "a great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1). When we face a decision to fall back or press on, the whole universe holds its breath-angels, demons, our friends and foes, and the Trinity itself-watching with bated breath to see what we will do. We are still in the drama of Act III and the heart of God is still on trial. The question that lingers from the fall of Satan and the fall of man remains: Will anyone trust the great heart of Father, or will we shrink back in faithless fear?

As we grow into the love of God and the freedom of our own hearts, we grow in our ability to cast our vote on behalf of God. Our acts of love and sacrifice, the little decisions to leave our false loves behind and the great struggles of our heart reveal to the world our true identity: We really are the sons and daughters of God...

[Satan says] it's better to stay in the safety of the camp than venture forth on a wing and prayer. Who knows what dangers lie ahead? This was the counsel of the ten
faithless spies sent to have a look at the Promised Land when [Israel] came out of Egypt. Only two of the twelve, Joshua and Caleb, saw things differently. Their hearts were captured by a vision of what might be and they urged the people to press on. But their voices were drowned by the fears of the ten other spies and Israel wandered for another forty years. Without the anticipation of better things ahead, we will have no heart for the journey.

One of the most poisonous of all Satan's whispers is simply, “Things will never change.” That lie kills expectation, trapping our heart forever in the present. To keep desire alive and flourishing, we must renew our vision for what lies ahead. Things will not always be like this. Jesus has promised to “make all things new”. Eye has not seen, ear has not heard all that God has in store for his lovers, which does not mean "we have no clue so don’t even try to imagine", but rather you cannot outdream God. Desire is kept alive by imagination, the antidote to resignation, which is to say, we will need hope...

Life on the road [with God] requires recollection of our Love's past deeds on our behalf and His promise of continued faithfulness to us. We will need courage and patience and those are strengthened by remembering. We will need memory, which is to say, we will need faith. Faith looks back and draws courage; hope looks ahead and keeps desire alive. And meantime? In the meantime we need one more item for our journey. To appreciate what it may be, we have to step back and ask, what is all this for?

The resurrection of our heart, the discovery of our role in the Larger Story, entering into the Sacred Romance - why do we pursue these things? If we say we seek all of this for our own sake, we’re right back where we started: lost in our own story. Jesus said that when a person lives merely to preserve his life, he eventually loses it altogether. Rather, He said, give your life away and discover life as it was always meant to be. "Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self" (Matthew 16:25, The Message). The road we travel will take us into the battle to restore beauty in all things, chief among them the hearts of those we know. We grow in glory so that we might assist others in doing so; we give our glory to increase theirs. In order to fulfill the purpose of our journey, we will need a passion to increase glory; we will need love.

Memory, imagination, and a passion for glory - these we must keep close at hand if we are to see the journey to its end. Dragons and nits and the noonday demons lie in wait. But the road is not entirely rough. There are oases along the way. It would be a dreadful mistake to assume that our Beloved is only waiting for us at the end of the road. Our communion with him sustains us along our path.

**Do We Abide in Him or Do We Abide in Other Things?**

Two years ago, worn out by three years of spiritual battle, I found myself asking the question this way: "Jesus, if your Spirit abides in me [through] the Holy Spirit, [which] is my Comforter, why do I so often feel alone and you seem so far away?" What came to me in response were Jesus' words in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Jesus was saying, "Living spiritually requires something more than just not sinning or doing good works. In order to live in the kingdom of heaven, you must abide in me. Your identity is in me."
"If I'm not abiding in Jesus, then where is it that I abide?", I asked myself. I began to notice that when I was tired or anxious, there were certain sentences I would say in my head that led me to a very familiar place. The journey to this place would often start with me walking around disturbed, feeling as if there was something deep inside that I needed to put into words but couldn't quite capture. I felt the "something" as an anxiety, a loneliness, and a need for connection with someone. If no connection came, I would start to say things like "Life really stinks. Why is it always so hard? It's never going to change." If no one noticed that I was struggling and asked me what was wrong, I found my sentences shifting again to a more cynical level: "Who cares? Life is really a joke." Surprisingly, I noticed by the time I was saying those last sentences, I was feeling better. The anxiety was greatly diminished.

My "comforter," my abiding place, was cynicism and rebellion. From this abiding place, I would feel free to use some soul cocaine - a violence video with maybe a little sexual titillation thrown in, perhaps having a little more alcohol with a meal than I might normally drink - things that would allow me to feel better for just a little while.

I had always thought of these things as just bad habits. I began to see that they were much more; they were spiritual abiding places that were my comforters and friends in a very spiritual way; literally, other lovers.

The final light went on one evening when I read John 15 in The Message. Peterson translates Jesus' words on abiding this way: "If you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon." Jesus was saying in answer to my question, "I have made my home in you, Brent. But you still have other comforters you go to. You must learn to make your home in me." I realized that my identity had something to do with simply "staying at home"...

By going to my abiding place of cynicism and rebellion, I was filling my heart cup with something that made the emptiness go away for a moment. I was "lying among the slain" rather than creeping out onto the unknown narrow path that leads to abiding in the comfort of Jesus. I began to reject the cynical thoughts when they came to comfort me and replace them with words of faith: "Jesus, I don't know how to heal myself of this anxiety. I don't even clearly understand it. But I will not anesthetize it with other lovers. I cling to you and trust in your healing."

At times, I experienced a different kind of peace. At other times, Jesus would bring certain of his words to mind: "I know the plans I have for you," He says in Jeremiah 29: 11, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Rather than indulge in my less-wild lovers, I began at times to tighten on the team the rigid rein and simply stand (rest) in faith...

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest," says Jesus. Most of us think of spiritual progress as requiring us to do more, even as our heart cries out to us to lay our burdens down. We renew our efforts at Bible study, Scripture memory, and Christian service, fearing that we will be discovered in our weakness and need. We try to use whatever...we have been living in - competence, gifted speaking, service to others, and so on - to cross the chasm between living in the flesh and living spiritually, when only Christ can carry us to rest. The kinds of "doing" we have learned are not weighty enough to allow us to walk in the spiritual fields of the kingdom of God.
God speaks to Israel through the prophet Isaiah when she is surrounded by enemies and making every effort to appease them through diplomacy, gifts, treaties, and bribes, and says this to her:

"You went to Molech with olive oil and increased your perfumes. You sent your ambassadors far away; you descended to the grave itself. You were wearied by all your ways, but you would not say, 'It is hopeless.' You found renewal of your strength, and so you did not faint" (Isaiah 57.9-10).

God calls Israel to repent by admitting her weariness and fainting. Instead, she looks for ways to use her personal assets to redeem herself. Jesus spoke to the people about rest and thirst. The Pharisees demanded that they obey a constantly growing weight of religious laws and traditions, and chastised them for staggering under the load. They led people in the exact opposite direction from where their salvation lay - in admitting their weariness and fainting. As long as they hoped in their self-sufficiency, they would not call out to God and receive forgiveness, healing, and restoration (p.165-169)...

You may recall the movie Chariots of Fire, which tells the story of two Olympic runners: Eric Liddell and Charles Abrams. Both are passionate about running, but in very different ways. Abrams runs because he is driven; he runs in order to prove something. He is a cheerless man whose whole life is motivated by ought, by duty, by the law. Liddell runs because he can't help it. "When I run," he says, "I feel God's pleasure." He knows a freedom of heart that Abrams can only watch from a distance. Abrams uses discipline to subdue and kill his heart. Liddell is so freed by grace that when he runs, Abrams says, "He runs like a wild animal - he unnerves me." "Where," Liddell asks, "does the power come from to see the race to its end? It comes from within." It comes from desire.

"The whole life of the good Christian," said Augustine, "is a holy longing." Sadly, many of us have been led to feel that somehow we ought to want less, not more. We have this sense that we should atone for our longings, apologize that we feel such deep desire. Shouldn't we be more content? Perhaps, but contentment is never wanting less - that's the easy way out. Anybody can look holy if she's killed her heart; the real test is to have your heart burning within you and have the patience to enjoy what there is now to enjoy, while waiting with eager anticipation for the feast to come. In Paul's words, we "groan inwardly as we wait eagerly (Romans 8:23) ...

As our soul grows in the love of God and journeys forth toward him, our heart's capacities also grow and expand: "Thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Psalm 119:32 KJV). A friend of mine is a missionary to Muslims in Senegal. He tells me that after conversion, Muslims will often notice flowers for the first time. Prior to salvation, Muslims in that and country live a very utilitarian existence. Things are valued only for what they can do. Their houses are dull and drab; trees are only appreciated if they are fruit trees; if they have a function. It is as if the Muslims have lived without beauty for their whole lives and now, having their souls released from bondage, they are freed into the pleasures of God’s creative heart. I’m struck by the parallels to modern fundamentalism. Their hatred of pleasure is not a sign of their godliness; quite the opposite. The redeemed heart hungers for beauty.

But the sword cuts both ways. While our heart grows in its capacity for pleasure, it grows in its capacity to know pain. The two go hand in hand. What, then, shall we do with disappointment? We can be our own enemy, depending on how we handle the
heartache that comes with desire. To want is to suffer; the word passion means to suffer. This is why many Christians are reluctant to listen to their hearts: They know that their dullness is keeping them from feeling the pain of life. Many of us have chosen simply not to want so much; it's safer that way. It's also godless. That's stoicism, not Christianity. Sanctification is an awakening, the rousing of our souls from the dead sleep of sin into the fullness of their capacity for life...

I am a lucky man. I have a family and friends who love me well. But they also let me down. When I feel the pain of their failure, I have several options. I can retreat into cynicism ("Isn't that the way life really is?") and deaden the pain by killing my desire. Or I can become more demanding ("You Will never do that again"), manipulating them and in a way increasing my addiction to relationship. Or I can let it be a reminder that a day is coming when we will all live in perfect love. I can let the ache lead me deeper into my heart and higher toward heaven. And this is where memory comes in. Desire keeps us moving forward; memory keeps us moving in the right direction. If we choose the way of desire, our greatest enemy on the road ahead is not the Arrows, nor Satan, nor our false lovers. The most crippling thing that besets the pilgrim heart is simply forgetfulness, or more accurately, the failure to remember...

Spiritual amnesia is so likely that from Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures are full of the call to remember. "Only be careful," says our Lover, "and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live" (Deuteronomy 4:9). How then can we keep these things in our hearts? How can we, in the words of Dan Allender, "reclaim the treasures of memory for our life's journey"? The author of Hebrews answers, "Rehearse the story. Go over it item by item - particularly the central scene" (p.199-203).

A good friend of mine made an interesting comment while I was going through a long trial that had been dragging on for many years. He said, "God has BIG plans for us now, not just in the future." In this life we can be tempted to resignation that we won't have the things we dream of such as "the good life" and think that we will just have to struggle through life, build the character we need and just have to wait until the Kingdom to experience "the good life".

That may well be the lot of some in God’s plan for them to bring out the best in them but that is more than the rule. We are precious and wonderful to Him and He longs to give us good things in life when He feels we are ready to handle them. Character is more important than comfort and blessings but He does care for us and wants to give us the latter also.

He knows our strengths and our talents and when our lives have been tested sufficiently and our hearts have become ready and prepared through the struggles of life He often will open up the windows of heaven and bless us. This is something that I have seen happen in my own life after years of struggle much like the happy ending that came upon Lieutenant Dan quite unexpectedly to him. He also wants us to use those blessings that finally come and tap into our full potential and talents and really help others with those blessings and talents.

In his final chapter speaks of the future at the end of the Book of Revelation that will be more exciting than we can possibly dream of. Knowing that makes all the pain and suffering we go through in this life worth enduring through to achieve that fantastic future (Romans 8:18) as Paul writes.

Paul speaks of the whole creation – the whole universe – waiting to be set free from its bondage to decay as we transform it and create beauty all over the universe with God (Romans 8:21-23). That is our ultimate destiny – joining the family business of creating beauty.
John Eldridge and Brent Curtis in this last chapter speak of going to heaven which is the traditional teaching of mainstream Christianity but not the Bible. They do speak of it in a different way than is usually taught in mainstream Christianity. They speak of us - the children of God – enjoying all of the new heaven and the new earth – not just simply being in the same spot in the third heaven for all eternity and thus it is a little closer to what actually is in the Bible. The Bible speaks of heaven coming to earth so, in one sense, we will go to heaven if you are speaking of heaven on earth when God the Father brings His headquarters to the new earth. For better clarity and accuracy in the last chapter I know quote from I have edited heaven with [God’s Kingdom] where I feel it works better:

Act IV – Our Happy Ending in the Kingdom of God

My wife, Stasi, reads the end of novels first. Until recently, I (John) never understood why. "I want to know how the story ends, to see if it's worth reading," she explained. "A story is only as good as its ending. Even the best stories leave you empty if the last chapter is disappointing.

"But the opposite is also true," she added. "A really tragic story can be saved by a happy ending."

"But doesn’t knowing the end take away the drama?" I asked.

"It only takes away the fear and frees you to enjoy the drama. Besides, some things are too important to be left to chance," she said, and turned back to her book.

A story is only as good as its ending. Without a happy ending that draws us on in eager anticipation, our journey becomes a nightmare of endless struggle. Is this all there is? Is this as good as it gets? On a recent flight I was chatting with one of the attendants about her spiritual beliefs. A follower of a New Age guru, she said with all earnestness, "I don't believe in heaven. I believe life is a never-ending cycle of birth and death." "What a horror," I thought to myself, "This Story had better have a happy ending." St. Paul felt the same. If this is as good as it gets, he said, you may as well stop at a bar on the way home and tie one on; go to Nordstrom's and max out all your credit cards; bake a cake and eat the whole thing. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

Our hearts cannot live without hope. Gabriel Marcel says that “hope is for the soul what breathing is for the living organism”...

"I knew a man who as a young boy hated the idea of heaven. He would puzzle and embarrass his Sunday school teachers by stating quite boldly, whenever the subject of heaven was brought up, that he didn’t want to go there. Finally, one of them had the sense to ask him why. His answer? "I don't like peas." He had heard the familiar Christmas carol "Silent Night," with the lovely refrain “Sleep in heavenly peace” and thought it referred to the vegetable. Like any red-blooded boy he figured there had to be better things to do.

Our images aren't much better. We speak so seldom of heaven and when we do, the images are sickly: fat babies fluttering around with tiny wings, bored saints lazing on shapeless clouds, strumming harps and wondering what’s happening back on earth where the real action is.

The crisis of hope that afflicts the church today is a crisis of imagination. Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft writes:
“Medieval imagery (which is almost totally biblical imagery) of light, jewels, stars, candies, trumpets, and angels no longer fits our ranch-style, supermarket world. Pathetic modern substitutes of fluffy clouds, sexless cherubs, harps and metal halos (not halos of light) presided over by a stuffy divine Chairman of the Bored are a joke, not a glory. Even more modern, more up-to-date substitutes – Heaven as a comfortable feeling of peace and kindness, sweetness and light, and God as a vague grandfatherly benevolence, a senile philanthropist – are even more insipid. Our pictures of Heaven simply do not move us; they are not moving pictures. It is this aesthetic failure rather than intellectual or moral failures in our pictures of Heaven and of God that threatens faith most potently today. Our pictures of Heaven are dull, platitudinous and syrupy; therefore, so is our faith, our hope, and our love of Heaven... It doesn't matter whether it's a dull lie or a dull truth. Dullness, not doubt, is the strongest enemy of faith, just as indifference, not hate, is the strongest enemy of love” (Everything You Wanted to Know About Heaven).

If our pictures of [God’s Kingdom] are to move us, they must be moving pictures. So go ahead –dream a little. Use your imagination. Picture the best possible ending to your story you can. If that isn't heaven, something better is. When Paul says, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (I Corinthians 2:9), he simply means we cannot outdream God. What is at the end of our personal journeys? Something beyond our wildest imagination. But if we explore the secrets of our heart in the light of the promises of Scripture, we can discover clues. As we have said from Chapter 1, there is in the heart of every man, woman, and child an inconsolable longing for intimacy, for beauty, and for adventure. What will [God's Kingdom] offer to our heart of hearts?...

**Intimacy in God's Kingdom**

[The Kingdom of God] is the beginning of an adventure in intimacy, “a world of love,” as Jonathan Edwards wrote, “where God is the fountain.” The Holy Spirit, through the human authors of Scripture, chose the imagery of a wedding feast for a reason. It’s not just any kind of party; it is a wedding feast. What sets this special feast apart from all others is the unique intimacy of the wedding night. The Spirit uses the most secret and tender experience on earth – the union of husband and wife – to convey the depth of intimacy that we will partake with our Lord in [God's Kingdom]. He is the Bridegroom and the church is His bride. In the consummation of love, we shall know Him and be known. There we shall receive our new name, known only to our Lover, which He shall give to us on a white stone (Revelation 2:17)...

The intimacy that begins between God and His people will be enriched and echoed by our communion with each other. The deepest longing of our heart – our longing to be part of the sacred circle, to be inside – reveals to us the greatest of the treasures heaven has in store. For we were made in and for the most sacred circle of all. Lewis says,

“The sense that in this universe we are treated as strangers, the longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality, is part of our inconsolable secret. And surely, from this point of view, the promise of glory, in the sense described, becomes highly relevant to our deep desire. For glory meant good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last” (The Weight of Glory)...
Beauty in the Kingdom

We long for beauty, and when the biblical writers speak of heaven, they use the most beautiful imagery they can. You can almost hear the agony of the writer trying to get it right while knowing he falls far short of what he sees. In the book of Revelation, St. John uses the word like again and again. “And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance... Before the throne there was ... a sea of glass like crystal” (Revelation 4:3, 6 NASB). The beauty cannot be captured, only alluded to by the most beautiful things on earth.

I believe the beauty of [God’s Kingdom] is why the Bible says we shall be “feasted.” It’s not merely that there will be no suffering, though that will be tremendous joy in itself; to have every Arrow we’ve ever known pulled out and every wound dressed with the leaves from the tree of life (Revelation 22:2). But there is more. We will have glorified bodies with which to partake of all the beauty of [God’s Kingdom]. As Edwards wrote, “Every faculty will be an inlet of delight.” We will eat freely the fruit of the tree of life and drink deeply from the river of life that flows through the city. And the food will satisfy not just our body but our soul. As Lewis said,

“We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words – to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it” (The Weight of Glory).

And so we shall.

Adventure in the Kingdom

What will we do in [God’s Kingdom]? The Sunday comics picture saints lying about on clouds, strumming harps. It hardly takes your breath away. The fact that most Christians have a gut sense that earth is more exciting than heaven points to the deceptive powers of the enemy and our own failure of imagination. What do we do with the idea of "eternal rest"? That sounds like the slogan of a middle-class cemetery. We know [God’s Kingdom] begins with a party, but then what? A long nap after the feast? The typical evangelical response – “We will worship God” – doesn’t help either. The answer is certainly biblical, and perhaps my reaction is merely a reflection on me, but it sounds so one-dimensional. Something in my heart says, “That’s all? How many hymns and choruses can we sing?”

We will worship God in [God’s Kingdom], meaning all of life will finally be worship, not round after round of “Amazing Grace.” The parable of the minas in Luke 19 and the talents in Matthew 25 foreshadow a day when we shall exercise our real place in God’s economy, the role we have been preparing for on earth. He who has been faithful in the small things will be given even greater adventures in [God’s Kingdom]. We long for adventure, to be caught up in something larger than ourselves, a drama of heroic proportions. This isn’t just a need for continual excitement, it’s part of our design. Few of us ever sense that our talents are being used to their fullest; our creative abilities are rarely given wings in this life. When Revelation 3 speaks of us being “pillars in the temple of our God,” it doesn’t mean architecture. Rather, Christ promises that we shall be actively fulfilling our total design in the adventures of the new kingdom.
Act IV - [God's Kingdom] – is the continuation of the Story that was interrupted by the Fall. God made the earth and entrusted it to us, to bring order and increase beauty. We were to be his regents, reigning with his blessing and authority. That arrangement was corrupted by the Fall so that the earth no longer responds to our leadership as it once did. When Christ accomplished our redemption, He didn’t do it to place us on the bench for eternity. He restored us to put us back in the game. He even subjected the earth to a time of futility until the day it will be “liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

We will then co-reign with Christ. “St. Peter for a few seconds walked on the water,” Lewis reminds us, “and the day will come when there will be a re-made universe, infinitely obedient to the will of glorified and obedient men, when we can do all things, when we shall be those gods that we are described as being in Scripture.”

Part of the adventure will be to explore the wonders of the new heaven and new earth, the most breathtaking of which will be God Himself. We will have all eternity to explore the mysteries of God, and not just explore, but celebrate and share with one another. Here is a remarkable thing to consider: Your soul has a unique shape that fits God. We are not are the same, but unique creations each of us...

However God may choose to evaluate our lives, whatever memory of our past we shall have in heaven, we know this: It will only contribute to our joy. We will read our story by the fight of redemption and see how God has used both the good and the bad, the sorrow and the gladness for our welfare and His glory. With the assurance of total forgiveness we will be free to know ourselves fully, walking again through the seasons of life to linger over the cherished moments and stand in awe at God’s grace for the moments we have tried so hard to forget. Our gratitude and awe will swell into worship of a Lover so strong and kind as to make us fully his own...

For now, our life is a journey of high stakes and frequent danger. But we have turned the corner; the long years in exile are winding down and we are approaching home. There is no longer any question as to whether we will make it and if it will be good when we get there. “I am going there to prepare a place for you,” Jesus promised. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me” (John 14:2-3).

One day soon we will round a bend in the road and our dreams will come true. We really will live happily ever after. The long years in exile will be swept away in the joyful tears of our arrival home. Every day when we rise, we can tell ourselves, My journey today will bring me closer to home; it may be just around’ the bend. All we long for we shall have; all we long to be, we win be. All that has hurt us so deeply – the dragons and nits, the Arrows and our false lovers, and Satan himself – they will all be swept away. And then real life begins (p.177-193).

Understanding God Through Understanding Man and Woman

Another wonderful book written by John Eldridge, co-author of “The Sacred Romance” is a book called "Wild At Heart". It gives some wonderful insights into the masculine heart as well as some insights into the feminine heart as well. These insights John Eldridge show reveal a lot to us about the heart and personality of the great God that we worship so now I will quote at length from "Wild at Heart":

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Christianity, as it currently exists, has done some terrible things to men. When all is said and done, I think most men in the church believe that God put them on the earth to be a good boy. The problem with men, we are told, is that they don't know how to keep their promises, be spiritual leaders, talk to their wives, or raise their children. But, if they will try real hard they can reach the lofty summit of becoming ... a nice guy. That's what we hold up as models of Christian maturity: Really Nice Guys. We don't smoke, drink, or swear; that's what makes us men. Now let me ask my male readers: In all your boyhood dreams growing up, did you ever dream of becoming a Nice Guy? (Ladies, was the Prince of your dreams dashing ... or merely nice?)...

God made the masculine heart, set it within every man, and thereby offers him an invitation: Come, and live out what I meant you to be...God meant something when He meant man, and if we are to ever find ourselves we must find that. What has He set in the masculine heart? Instead of asking what you think you ought to do to become a better man (or woman, for my female readers), I want to ask, What makes you come alive? What stirs your heart? The journey we face now is into a land foreign to most of us. We must head into country that has no clear trail. This charter for exploration takes us into our own hearts, into our deepest desires. As the playwright Christopher Fry says, "Life is a hypocrite if I can't live the way it moves me."

There are three desires I find written so deeply into my heart I know now I can no longer disregard them without losing my soul. They are core to who and what I am and yearn to be. I gaze into boyhood, I search the pages of literature, I listen carefully to many, many men, and I am convinced these desires are universal, a clue into masculinity itself.

They may be misplaced, forgotten, or misdirected, but in the heart of every man is a desperate desire for a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.

A Battle to Fight

I want you to think of the films men love, the things they do with their free time, and especially the aspirations of little boys and see if I am not right on this...

Capes and swords, camouflage, bandannas and six-shooters - these are the uniforms of boyhood. Little boys yearn to know they are powerful, they are dangerous, they are someone to be reckoned with...Every stick or fallen branch is a spear, or better, a bazooka. Despite what many modern educators would say, this is not a psychological disturbance brought on by violent television or chemical imbalance. Aggression is part of the masculine design; we are hardwired for it. If we believe that man is made in the image of God, then we would do well to remember that "the LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name" (Exodus 15:3)...

A boy wants to attack something - and so does a man, even if it's only a little white ball on a tee. He wants to whack it into kingdom come. On the other hand, my boys do not sit down to tea parties. They do not call their friends on the phone to talk about relationships. They grow bored of games that have no element of danger or competition or bloodshed. Cooperative games based on "relational interdependence" are complete nonsense... "No one wins? What's the point?" The universal nature of this ought to have convinced us by now: The boy is a warrior; the boy is his name. And those are not boyish antics he is doing. When boys play at
war they are rehearsing their part in a much bigger drama. One day, you just might need that boy to defend you. Those Union soldiers who charged the stone walls at Bloody Angle; the Allied troops that hit the beaches at Normandy or the sands of Iwo Jima - what would they have done without this deep part of their heart? Life needs a man to be fierce and fiercely devoted. The wounds he will take throughout his life will cause him to lose heart if all he has been trained to be is soft. This is especially true in the murky waters of relationships, where a man feels least prepared to advance. As Bly says, "In every relationship something fierce is needed once in a while."

Now, this longing may have submerged from years of neglect, and a man may not feel that he is up to the battles he knows await him. Or it may have taken a very dark turn, as it has with inner-city gangs. But the desire is there. Every man wants to play the hero. Every man needs to know that he is powerful. Women didn't make Braveheart one of the best-selling films of the decade. The Bridge on the River Kwai, The Magnificent Seven, High Noon, Saving Private Ryan, Top Gun, the Die Hard films, Gladiator - the movies a man loves reveal what his heart longs for, what is set inside him from the day of his birth. Like it or not, there is something fierce in the heart of every man...

**An Adventure To Live**

Compare your experience watching the latest James Bond or Indiana Jones thriller with, say, going to Bible study. The guaranteed success of each new release makes it clear - adventure is written into the heart of a man. And it's not just about having "fun." Adventure requires something of us, puts us to the test.

Though we may fear the test, at the same time we yearn to be tested, to discover that we have what it takes. That's why we set off down the Snake River against all sound judgment, why a buddy and I pressed on through grizzly country to find good fishing, why I went off to Washington, D.C., as a young man to see if I could make it in those shark-infested waters. If a man has lost this desire, says he doesn't want it, that's only because he doesn't know he has what it takes, believes that he will fail the test. And so he decides it's better not to try. For reasons I hope to make clear later, most men hate the unknown and, like Cain, want to settle down and build their own city, get on top of their life. But you can't escape it - there is something wild in the heart of every man.

**A Beauty To Rescue**

A man wants to be the hero to the beauty...What would Robin Hood or King Arthur be without the woman they love? Lonely men fighting lonely battles. Indiana Jones and James Bond just wouldn't be the same without a beauty at their side, and inevitably they must fight for her. You see, it's not just that a man needs a battle to fight; he needs someone to fight for. Remember Nehemiah's words to the few brave souls defending a wall-less Jerusalem? "Don't be afraid... fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." The battle itself is never enough; a man yearns for romance. It's not enough to be a hero; it's that he is a hero to someone in particular, to the woman he loves...

**She Wants To Be Wanted and Pursued**

There are also three desires that I have found essential to a woman's heart, which are not entirely different from a man's and yet they remain distinctly feminine. Not
every woman wants a battle to fight, but every woman yearns to be fought for. Listen to the longing of a woman’s heart: She wants to be more than noticed - she wants to be wanted. She wants to be pursued. I just want to be a priority to someone,” a friend in her thirties told me. And her childhood dreams of a knight in shining armor coming to rescue her are not girlish fantasies; they are the core of the feminine heart and the life she knows she was made for. So Zach comes back for Paula in “An Officer and a Gentleman”, Frederick comes back for Jo in “Little Women”, and Edward returns to pledge his undying love for Eleanor in “Sense and Sensibility”.

**She Wants An Adventure To Share**

Every woman also wants an adventure to share. One of my wife's favorite films is The Man from Snowy River. She loves the scene where Jessica, the beautiful young heroine, is rescued by Jim, her hero, and together they ride on horseback through the wilds of the Australian wilderness.

"I want to be Isabo in Ladyhawk," confessed another female friend. "To be cherished, pursued, fought for - yes. But also, I want to be strong and a part of the adventure." So many men make the mistake of thinking that the woman is the adventure. But that is where the relationship immediately goes downhill. A woman doesn’t want to be the adventure; she wants to be caught up into something greater than herself.

**She Wants To Have A Beauty To Unveil**

And finally, every woman wants to have a beauty to unveil...My wife remembers standing on top of the coffee table as a girl of five or six, and singing her heart out. Do you see me? asks the heart of every girl. And are you captivated by what you see?

The world kills a woman's heart when it tells her to be tough, efficient, and independent. Sadly, Christianity has missed her heart as well. Walk into most churches in America, have a look around, and ask yourself this question: What is a Christian woman? Again, don’t listen to what is said, look at what you find there. There is no doubt about it. You’d have to admit a Christian woman is ... tired. All we’ve offered the feminine soul is pressure to “be a good servant.” No one is fighting for her heart; there is no grand adventure to be swept up in; and every woman doubts very much that she has any beauty to unveil (p.7-17)...

**A Wild God Who Takes Risks**

Christ draws the enemy out, exposes him for what he is, and shames him in front of everyone. The Lord is a gentleman??? Not if you’re in the service of his enemy. God has a battle to fight, and the battle is for our freedom. As Tremper Longman says, "Virtually every book of the Bible - Old and New Testaments and almost every page tells us about God's warring activity." I wonder if the Egyptians who kept Israel under the whip would describe Yahweh as a Really Nice Guy? Plagues, pestilence, the death of every firstborn - that doesn't seem very gentlemanly now, does it? What would Miss Manners have to say about taking the promised land (p.25)...

In an attempt to secure the sovereignty of God, theologians have overstated their case and left us with a chess-player God playing both sides of the board, making all his moves and all ours too. But clearly, this is not so. God is a person who takes immense risks. No doubt the biggest risk of all was when He gave angels and men
free will, including the freedom to reject him not just once, but every single day. Does God cause a person to sin? "Absolutely not!" says Paul (Galatians 2:17). Then He can't be moving all the pieces on the board, because people sin all the time. Fallen angels and men use their powers to commit horrendous daily evil. Does God stop every bullet fired at an innocent victim? Does he prevent teenage liaisons from producing teenage pregnancies? There is something much more risky going on here than we're often willing to admit.

Most of us do everything we can to reduce the element of risk in our lives. We wear our seat belts, watch our cholesterol, and practice birth control. I know some couples who have decided against having children altogether; they simply aren't willing to chance the heartache children often bring. What if they are born with a crippling disease? What if they turn their backs on us, and God? What if ... ? God seems to fly in the face of all caution. Even though he knew what would happen, what heartbreak and suffering and devastation would follow upon our disobedience, God chose to have children. And unlike some hyper-controlling parents, who take away every element of choice they can from their children, God gave us a remarkable choice. He did not make Adam and Eve obey Him. He took a risk. A staggering risk, with staggering consequences. He let others into His story, and He lets their choices shape it profoundly.

This is the world He has made. This is the world that is still going on. And He doesn't walk away from the mess we've made of it. Now He lives, almost cheerfully, certainly heroically, in a dynamic relationship with us and with our world. "Then the Lord intervened" is perhaps the single most common phrase about Him in Scripture, in one form or another. Look at the stories He writes. There's the one where the children of Israel are pinned against the Red Sea, no way out, with Pharaoh and his army barreling down on them in murderous fury. Then God shows up. There's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who get rescued only after they're thrown into the fiery furnace. Then God shows up. He lets the mob kill Jesus, bury Him ... then He shows up. Do you know why God loves writing such incredible stories? Because He loves to come through. He loves to show us that He has what it takes.

It's not the nature of God to limit His risks and cover His bases. Far from it. Most of the time, He actually lets the odds stack up against Him. Against Goliath, a seasoned soldier and a trained killer, He sends ... a freckle-faced little shepherd kid with a slingshot. Most commanders going into battle want as many infantry as they can get. God cuts Gideon's army from thirty-two thousand to three-hundred. Then He equips the ragtag little band that's left with torches and watering pots. It's not just a battle or two that God takes His chances with, either. Have you thought about His handling of the gospel? God needs to get a message out to the human race, without which they will perish ... forever. What's the plan? First, He starts with the most unlikely group ever: a couple of prostitutes, a few fishermen with no better than a second-grade education, a tax collector. Then, He passes the ball to us. Unbelievable.

God's relationship with us and with our world is just that: a relationship. As with every relationship, there's a certain amount of unpredictability, and the ever-present likelihood that you'll get hurt. The ultimate risk anyone ever takes is to love, for as C. S. Lewis says, "Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal." But God does give it, again and again and again, until He is literally bleeding from it all. God's willingness to risk is just astounding - far beyond what any of us would do were we in His position.
Trying to reconcile God's sovereignty and man's free will has stumped the church for ages. We must humbly acknowledge that there's a great deal of mystery involved, but for those aware of the discussion, I am not advocating open theism. Nevertheless, there is definitely something wild in the heart of God.

**God’s Romantic Heart**

And all His wildness and all His fierceness are inseparable from His romantic heart. That theologians have missed this says more about theologians than it does about God. Music, wine, poetry, sunsets...those were His inventions, not ours. We simply discovered what He had already thought of. Lovers and honeymooners choose places like Hawaii, the Bahamas, or Tuscany as a backdrop for their love. But whose idea was Hawaii, the Bahamas, and Tuscany? Let's bring this a little closer to home. Whose idea was it to create the human form in such a way that a kiss could be so delicious? And He didn’t stop there, as only lovers know. Starting with her eyes, King Solomon is feasting on his beloved through the course of their wedding night. He loves her hair, her smile, her lips “drop sweetness as the honeycomb” and “milk and honey are under her tongue.” You’ll notice he’s working his way down:

"Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance...Your two breasts are like two fawns...Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense” *(Song of Solomon 4:4-6).*

And his wife responds by saying, "Let my lover come into his' garden and taste its choice fruits" *(Song of Solomon 4:16).* What kind of God, would put the Song of Songs in the canon of Holy Scripture? Really, now, is it conceivable that such an erotic and scandalous book would have been placed in the Bible by the Christians you know? And what a delicate, poetic touch, "two fawns." This is no pornography, but there is no way to try to explain it all as "theological metaphor." That’s just nonsense. In fact, God Himself actually speaks in person in the Songs, once in the entire book.

Solomon has taken his beloved to his bedchamber and the two are doing everything that lovers do there. God blesses it all, whispering, "Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers" *(Song of Solomon 5:1)*, offering, as if needed, His own encouragement. And then He pulls the shades.

God is a romantic at heart, and He has His own bride to fight for. He is a jealous lover, and His jealousy is for the hearts of His people and for their freedom. As Francis Frangipane so truly states, "Rescue is the constant pattern of God's activity."

"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch...As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" *(Isaiah 62:1, 5).*

And though she has committed adultery against Him, though she has fallen captive to His enemy, God is willing to move heaven and earth to win her back. He will stop at nothing to set her free:

"Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save. Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations
no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come" (Isaiah 63:1-4).

Whoa. Talk about a Braveheart. This is one fierce, wild, and passionate guy. I have never heard Mister Rogers talk like that. Come to think of it, I have never heard anyone in church talk like that, either. But this is the God of heaven and earth. The Lion of Judah...

Eve and all her daughters are also "a stem of that victorious stock," but in a wonderfully different way. As a counselor and a friend, and especially as a husband, I've been honored to be welcomed into the deep heart of Eve. Often when I am with a woman, I find myself quietly wondering, What is she telling me about God? I know He wants to say something to the world through Eve - what is it? And after years of hearing the heart-cry of women, I am convinced beyond a doubt of this: God wants to be loved. He wants to be a priority to someone. How could we have missed this. From cover to cover, from beginning to end, the cry of God's heart is, "Why won't you choose Me?" It is amazing to me how humble, how vulnerable God is on this point. "You will ... find me," says the Lord, "when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). In other words, "Look for me, pursue me - I want you to pursue me." Amazing. As Tozer says, "God waits to be wanted."

And certainly we see that God wants not merely an adventure, but an adventure to share. He didn't have to make us, but He wanted to. Though He knows the name of every star and His kingdom spans galaxies, God delights in being a part of our lives. Do you know why He often doesn't answer prayer right away? Because He wants to talk to us, and sometimes that's the only way to get us to stay and talk to Him. His heart is for relationship, for shared adventure to the core.

And yes, God has a beauty to unveil. There's a reason that a man is captivated by a woman. Eve is the crown of creation. If you follow the Genesis narrative carefully, you'll see that each new stage of creation is better than the one before. First, all is formless, empty and dark. God begins to fashion the raw materials, like an artist working with a rough sketch or a lump of clay. Light and dark, land and sea, earth and sky - it's beginning to take shape. With a word, the whole floral kingdom adorns the earth. Sun, moon, and stars fill the sky. Surely and certainly, His work expresses greater detail and definition. Next come fish and fowl, porpoises and red-tailed hawks. The wild animals are next, all those amazing creatures. A trout is a wonderful creature, but a horse is truly magnificent. Can you hear the crescendo starting to swell, like a great symphony building and surging higher and higher?

Then comes Adam, the triumph of God's handiwork. It is not to any member of the animal kingdom that God says, "You are my very image, the icon of my likeness." Adam bears the likeness of God in his fierce, wild, and passionate heart. And yet, there is one more finishing touch. There is Eve. Creation comes to its high point, its climax with her. She is God's finishing touch. And all Adam can say is, "Wow." Eve embodies the beauty and the mystery and the tender vulnerability of God. As the poet William Blake said, "The naked woman's body is a portion of eternity too great for the eye of man."

The reason a woman wants a beauty to unveil, the reason she asks, Do you delight in me? is simply that God does as well. God is captivating beauty. As David prays, "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may ... gaze upon the beauty of the
LORD" (Psalm 27:4). Can there be any doubt that God wants to be worshiped? That He wants to be seen, and for us to be captivated by what we see? As C. S. Lewis wrote, 'The beauty of the female is the root of joy to the female as well as to the male...to desire the enjoying of her own beauty is the obedience of Eve, and to both it is in the lover that the beloved tastes of her own delightfulness" (p.30-37)...

**Failing to Live By Our Design**

Why does God create Adam? What is a man for? If you know what something is designed to do, then you know its purpose in life. A retriever loves the water; a lion loves the hunt; a hawk loves to soar. It's what they're made for. Desire reveals design, and design reveals destiny. In the case of human beings, our design is also revealed by our desires. Let's take adventure. Adam and all his sons after him are given an incredible mission: rule and subdue, be fruitful and multiply. "Here is the entire earth, Adam. Explore it, cultivate it, care for it - it is your kingdom." Whoa ... talk about an invitation. This is permission to do a heck of a lot more than cross the street. It's a charter to find the equator; it's a commission to build Camelot. Only Eden is a garden at that point; everything else is wild, so far as we know. No river has been charted, no ocean crossed, no mountain climbed. No one's discovered the molecule, or fuel injection, or Beethoven's Fifth. It's a blank page, waiting to be written. A clean canvas, waiting to be painted.

Most men think they are simply here on earth to kill time and it's killing them. But the truth is precisely the opposite. The secret longing of your heart, whether it's to build a boat and sail it, to write a symphony and play it, to plant a field and care for it - those are the things you were made to do. That's what you're here for. Explore, build, conquer - you don't have to tell a boy to do those things for the simple reason that it is his purpose. But it's going to take risk, and danger, and there's the catch. Are we willing to live with the level of risk God invites us to? Something inside us hesitates.

Let's take another desire - why does a man long for a battle to fight? Because when we enter the story in Genesis, we step into a world at war. The lines have already been drawn. Evil is waiting to make its next move. Somewhere back before Eden, in the mystery of eternity past, there was a coup, a rebellion, an assassination attempt. Lucifer, the prince of angels, the captain of the guard, rebelled against [God]. He tried to take the throne of heaven by force, assisted by a third of the angelic army, in whom he instilled his own malice. They failed, and were hurled from the presence of [God]. But they were not destroyed, and the battle is not over. God now has an enemy...and so do we. Man is not born into a sitcom or a soap opera; he is born into a world at war. This is not Home Improvement; it's Saving Private Ryan. There will be many, many battles to fight on many different battlefields.

And finally, why does Adam long for a beauty to rescue? Because there is Eve. He is going to need her, and she is going to need him. In fact, Adam's first and greatest battle is just about to break out, as a battle for Eve. But let me set the stage a bit more. Before Eve is drawn from Adam's side and leaves that ache that never goes away until he is with her, God gives Adam some instructions on the care of creation, and his role in the unfolding story. It's pretty basic, and very generous. "You may freely eat any fruit in the garden except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:16-17 NLT). Okay, most of us have heard about that. But notice what God doesn't tell Adam.
There is no warning or instruction over what is about to occur: the Temptation of Eve. This is just staggering. Notably missing from the dialogue between Adam and God is something like this: "Adam, one more thing. A week from Tuesday, about four in the afternoon, you and Eve are going to be down in the orchard and something dangerous is going to happen. Adam, are you listening? The eternal destiny of the human race hangs on this moment. Now, here's what I want you to do..." He doesn't tell him. He doesn't even mention it, so far as we know. Good grief - why not? Because God believes in Adam. This is what he's designed to do - to come through in a pinch. Adam doesn't need play-by-play instructions because this is what Adam is for. It's already there, everything he needs, in his design, in his heart.

Needless to say, the story doesn't go well. Adam fails; he fails Eve, and the rest of humanity. Let me ask you a question: Where is Adam, while the serpent is tempting Eve He's standing right there: "She also gave some to her husband, who was with her. Then he ate it, too" (Genesis 3:6 NLT). The Hebrew for "with her" means right there, elbow to elbow. Adam isn't away in another part of the forest; he has no alibi. He is standing right there, watching the whole thing unravel. What does he do?

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. He says not a word, doesn't lift a finger. He won't risk, he won't fight, and he won't rescue Eve. Our first father - the first real man - gave in to paralysis. He denied his very nature and went passive. And every man after him, every son of Adam, carries in his heart now the same failure. Every man repeats the sin of Adam, every day. We won't risk, we won't fight, and we won't rescue Eve. We truly are a chip off the old block.

Lest we neglect Eve, I must point out that she fails her design as well. Eve is given to Adam as his ezer kenegdo---or as many translations have it, his "help meet" or "helper." Doesn't sound like much, does it? It makes me think of Hamburger Helper. But Robert Alter says this is "a notoriously difficult word to translate. It means something far more powerful than just "helper"; it means "lifesaver." The phrase is only used elsewhere of God, when you need him to come through for you desperately. "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you" (Deuteronomy 33:26). Eve is a life giver; she is Adam's ally. It is to both of them that the charter for adventure is given. It will take both of them to sustain life. And they will both need to fight together.

Eve is deceived...and rather easily, as my friend Jan Meyers points out. In "The Allure of Hope", Jan says, "Eve was convinced that God was withholding something from her." Not even the extravagance of Eden could convince her that God's heart is good. When Eve was [deceived], the artistry of being a woman took a fateful dive into the barren places of control and loneliness. Now every daughter of Eve wants to "control her surrounding, her relationships, her God."

No longer is she vulnerable; now she will be grasping. No longer does she want simply to share in the adventure; now, she wants to control it. And as for her beauty, she either hides it in fear and anger, or she uses it to secure her place in the world. "In our fear that no one will speak on our behalf or protect us or fight for us, we start to recreate both ourselves and our role in the story. We manipulate our surroundings so we don't feel so defenseless." Fallen Eve either becomes rigid or clingy. Put simply, Eve is no longer simply inviting. She is either hiding in busyness or demanding that Adam come through for her; usually, an odd combination of both...
Adam falls, and all his sons with him. After that, what do you see as the story unfolds? Violent men, or passive men. Strength gone bad. Cain kills Abel; Lamech threatens to kill everybody else. God finally floods the earth because of the violence of men, but it's still going on. Sometimes it gets physical; most of the time, it's verbal. I know Christian men who say the most awful things to their wives. Or they kill them with their silence; a cold, deadly silence. I know pastors, warm and friendly guys in the pulpit, who from the safety of their office send out blistering emails to their staff. It's cowardice, all of it. I was intrigued to read in the journals of civil war commanders how the men you, thought would be real heroes end up just the opposite (p.48-55)...

In order to understand how a man receives a wound [to his masculinity and self-esteem], you must understand the central truth of a boy's journey to manhood. Masculinity is bestowed. A boy learns who he is and what he's got from a man, or the company of men. He cannot learn it any other place. He cannot learn it from other boys, and he cannot learn it from the world of women. The plan from the beginning of time was that his father would lay the foundation for a young boy's heart and pass on to him that essential knowledge and confidence in his strength. Dad would be the first man in his life and forever the most important man. Above all, he would answer the question [Do I have what it takes?] for his son and give him his name. Throughout the history of man given to us in Scripture, it is the father who gives the blessing and thereby "names" the son. Adam receives his name from God and also the power of naming. He names Eve and I believe it is safe to say he also names their sons (p.62)...

**Seeking Our Validation From God Not From Women**

A man who has married a woman has made her a solemn pledge; he can never heal his wound by delivering another to the one he promised to love. Sometimes she will leave him; that is another story. To many men run after her, begging her not to go. If she has to go, it is probably because you have some soul work to do. What I am saying is that the masculine journey always takes a man away from the woman, in order that he may come back to her with his question answered.

[Again, this is not permission to divorce.] A man does not go to a woman to get his strength; he goes to her to offer it. You do not need the woman for you to become a great man, and as a great man you do not need the woman. As Augustine said, "Let my soul praise you for all these beauties, but let it not attach itself to them by the trap of love" - the trap of addiction because we've taken our soul to her for validation.

But there is an even deeper issue than our question. What else is it we are seeking from the Woman with the Golden Hair? What is that ache we are trying to assuage with her? Mercy, comfort, beauty, ecstasy - in a word, God. I'm serious. What we are looking for is God.

There was a time when Adam drank deeply from the source of all Love. He - our first father and archetype - lived in an unbroken communion with the most captivating, beautiful, and intoxicating Source of life in the universe. Adam had God. True, it was not good for man to be alone, and God in His humility gave us Eve, allowed us to need her as well. But something happened at the Fall; something shifted. Eve took the place of God in a man's life. Let me explain.
Adam was not deceived by the serpent. Did you know that? Paul makes it clear in 1 Timothy 2:14 - Adam did not fall because he was deceived. His sin was different; in some ways, it was more serious in that he did it with open eyes. We do not know how long it lasted, but there was a moment in Eden when Eve was fallen and Adam was not; she had eaten, but he yet had a choice. I believe something took place in his heart that went like this: “I have lost my ezer kenegdo, my soul mate, the most vital companion I’ve known. I do not know what life will be like, but I know I cannot live without her.” Adam chose Eve over God.

If you think I exaggerate, simply look around. Look at all the art, poetry, music, drama devoted to the beautiful woman. Listen to the language men use to describe her. Watch the powerful obsession at work. What else can this be but worship? Men come into the world without the God who was our deepest joy, our ecstasy. Aching for we know not what, we meet Eve’s daughters and we are history. She is the closest thing we’ve ever encountered, the pinnacle of creation, the very embodiment of God’s beauty and mystery and tenderness and allure. And what goes out to her is not just our longing for Eve, but our longing for God as well. A man without his true love, his life, his God, will find another. What better substitute than Eve’s daughters? Nothing else in creation even comes close.

To a young man who had never been without a girlfriend since the eighth grade, I gave the advice that he should break up, call off all dating for one year. From the look on his face you’d have thought I told him to cut off his arm...or something worse. Do you see what is at work here? Notice that the struggle with pornography or masturbation is most difficult when you are lonely, or beat up, or longing for comfort in some way. This will become more intense as you get closer to your wound. The longing for the ache to go away, and the pull toward other comforters can seem overwhelming. I’ve watched it in many men. I know it in myself. But if this is the water you are truly thirsty for then why do you remain thirsty after you’ve had a drink? It's the wrong well.

We must reverse Adam's choice; we must choose God over Eve. We must take our ache to him. For only in God will we find the healing of our wound (p.115-117)...

**Seeking God and Living By Our Design**

Guys are unanimously embarrassed by their emptiness and woundedness; it is for most of us a tremendous source of shame, as I’ve said. But it need not be. From the very beginning, back before the Fall and the assault, ours was meant to be a desperately dependent existence. It's like a tree and its branches, explains Christ. “You are the branches, I am the trunk. From me you draw your life; that's how it was meant to be.” In fact, he goes on to say, "Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). He’s not berating us or mocking us or even saying it with a sigh, all the while thinking, I wish they’d pull it together and stop needing me so much. Not at all. We are made to depend on God; we are made for union with him and nothing about us works right without it. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other.”

This is where our sin and our culture have come together to keep us in bondage and brokenness, to prevent the healing of our wound. Our sin is that stubborn part inside that wants, above all else, to be independent. There’s a part of us fiercely committed to living in a way where we do not have to depend on anyone - especially
God. Then culture comes along with figures like John Wayne and James Bond and all those other "real men," and the one thing they have in common is that they are loners - they don't need anyone. We come to believe deep in our hearts that needing anyone for anything is a sort of weakness, a handicap. This is why a man never, ever stops to ask for directions...

The true essence of strength is passed to us from God through our union with Him. Notice what a deep and vital part of King David's life this is. Remembering that he is a man's man, a warrior for sure, listen to how he describes his relationship to God in the Psalms:

"I love you, O LORD, my strength" (Psalms 18:1).

"But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me" (Psalms 22:19).

"O my Strength, I watch for you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God" (Psalms 59:9).

I dare say that David could take on John Wayne or James Bond any day; yet this true man is unashamed to admit his desperate, dependence on God (p.121-123)...

"However strong a castle may be, if a treacherous party resides inside (ready to betray at the first opportunity possible), the castle cannot be kept safe from the enemy. Traitors occupy our own hearts, ready to side with every temptation and to surrender to them all" (John Owen, Sin and Temptation).

Ever since that fateful day when Adam gave away the essence his strength, men have struggled with a part of themselves that is ready at the drop of a hat to do the same. We don't want to speak up unless we know it will go well, and we don't want to move unless we're guaranteed success. What the Scriptures call the flesh, the old man, or the sinful nature, is that part of fallen Adam in every man that always wants the easiest way out. It's much easier to masturbate than to make love to your wife, especially if things are not well between you and initiating sex with her feels risky. It's much easier to go down to the driving range and attack a bucket of balls than it is to face the people at work who are angry at you. It's much easier to clean the garage, organize your files, cut the grass, or work on the car than it is to talk to your teenage daughter.

To put it bluntly, your flesh is a weasel, a poser, and a selfish pig. And your flesh is not you. Did you know that? Your flesh is not the real you. When Paul gives us his famous passage on what it's like to struggle with sin (Romans 7), he tells a story we are all too familiar with:

"I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time. It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge" (The Message).

Okay, we've all been there many times. But what Paul concludes is just astounding: "I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it" (Romans 7:20 NLT).
Did you notice the distinction he makes? Paul says, "Hey, I know I struggle with sin. But I also know that my sin is not me - this is not my true heart." You are not your sin; sin is no longer the truest thing about the man who has come into union with Jesus. Your heart is good. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you..." (Ezekiel 36:26). The Big Lie in the church today is that you are nothing more than "a sinner saved by grace." You are a lot more than that. You are a new creation in Christ. The New Testament calls you a saint, a holy one, a son of God. In the core of your being you are a good man. Yes, there is a war within us, but it is a civil war. The battle is not between us and God; no, there is a traitor within who wars against our true heart fighting alongside the Spirit of God in us:

"A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death... Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won't know what we're talking about. But for you who welcome him in whom he dwells ... if the alive – and present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus...When God lives and breathes in you (and He does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life" (Romans 8:2-3, 9-11; The Message)

The real you is on the side of God against the false self. Knowing this makes all the difference in the world. The man who wants to live valiantly will lose heart quickly if he believes that his heart is nothing but sin. Why fight? The battle feels lost before it even begins. No, your flesh is your false self - the poser, manifest in cowardice and self-preservation - and the only way to deal with it is to crucify it. Now follow me very closely here: We are never, ever told to crucify our heart. We are never told to kill the true man within us, never told to get rid of those deep desires for battle and adventure and beauty. We are told to shoot the traitor. How? Choose against him every time you see him raise his ugly head. Walk right into those situations you normally run from. Speak right to the issues you normally remain silent over. If you want to grow in true masculine strength, then you must stop sabotaging yours (p.143-145)...

If the man refuses to offer himself, then his wife will remain empty and barren. A violent man destroys with his words; a silent man starves his wife. "She's wilting," a friend confessed to me about his new bride. "If she's wilting then you're withholding something," I said. Actually, it was several things - his words, his touch, but mostly his delight. There are so many other ways this plays out in life. A man who leaves his wife with the children and the bills to go and find another, easier life has denied them his strength. He has sacrificed them when he should have sacrificed his strength for them. What makes Maximus or William Wallace so heroic is simply this: They are willing to die to set others free.

This sort of heroism is what we see in the life of Joseph, the husband of Mary and the stepfather to Jesus Christ. I don't think we've fully appreciated what he did for them. Mary, an engaged young woman, almost a girl, turns up pregnant with a pretty wild story: "I'm carrying God's child." The situation is scandalous. What is Joseph to think; what is he to feel? Hurt, confused, betrayed no doubt. But he's a good man; he will not have her stoned, he will simply "divorce her quietly" (Matthew 1:19).

An angel comes to him in a dream (which shows you what it sometimes takes to get a good man to do the right thing) to convince him that Mary is telling the truth and he is to follow through with the marriage. This is going to cost him. Do you know what he's
going to endure if he marries a woman the whole community thinks is an adulteress? He will be shunned by his business associates and most of his clients; he will certainly lose his standing in society and perhaps even his place in the synagogue. To see the pain he's in for, notice the insult that crowds will later use against Jesus. "Isn't this Joseph and Mary's son?" they say with a sneer and a nudge and a wink. In other words, we know who you are - the bastard child of that slut and her foolish carpenter. Joseph will pay big-time for this move. Does he withhold? No, he offers Mary his strength; he steps right between her and all of that mess and takes it on the chin. He spends himself for her.

"They will be called oaks of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:3). There, under the shadow of a man's strength, a woman finds rest. The masculine journey takes a man away from the woman so that he might return to her. He goes to find his strength; he returns to offer it. He tears down the walls of the tower that has held her with his words and with his actions. He speaks to her heart's deepest question in a thousand ways. Yes, you are lovely. Yes, there is one who will fight for you. But because most men have not yet fought the battle, most women are still in the tower (p.186-187)...

**Following Your Heart's Calling**

Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

I was struck dumb. It could have been Balaam's donkey, for all I was concerned. Suddenly my life up till that point made sense in a sickening sort of way; I realized I was living a script written for me by someone else. All my life I had been asking the world to tell me what to do with myself. This is different from seeking counsel or advice; what I wanted was freedom from responsibility and especially freedom from risk. I wanted someone else to tell me who to be. Thank God it didn't work. The scripts they handed me I simply could not bring myself to play for very long. Like Saul's armor, they never fit. Can a world of posers tell you to do anything but pose yourself? As Buechner says, we are in constant danger of being not actors in the drama of our lives but reactors, "to go where the world takes us, to drift with whatever current happens to be running the strongest." Reading the counsel given to Bailie I knew it was God speaking to me. It was an invitation to come out of Ur. I set the volume down without turning another page and walked out of that bookstore to find a life worth living.

I applied to graduate school and got accepted. That program would turn out to be far more than a career move; out of the transformation that took place there I became a writer, counselor, and speaker. The whole trajectory of my life changed and with it the lives of many, many other people. But I almost didn't go. You see, when I applied to school I hadn't a nickel to pay for it. I was married with three children and a mortgage, and that's the season when most men completely abandon their dreams and back down from jumping off anything. The risk just seems too great. On top of it all, I received a call about that time from a firm back in Washington, D.C., offering me a plum job at an incredible salary. I would be in a prestigious company, flying in some very powerful circles, making great money. God was thickening the plot, testing my resolve. Down one road was my dream and desire, which I had no means to pay for, and an absolutely uncertain future after that; down the other was a comfortable step up the ladder of success, a very obvious next career move and the total loss of my soul.
I went to the mountains for the weekend to sort things out. Life makes more sense standing alone by a lake at high elevation with a fly rod in hand. The tentacles of the world and my false self seemed to give way as I climbed up into the Holy Cross Wilderness. On the second day God began to speak. "John, you can take that job if you want to. It's not a sin. But it'll kill you and you know it." He was right; it had false self written all over it. "If you want to follow Me," He continued, "I'm heading that way." I knew exactly what He meant - "that way" headed into wilderness, frontier.

The following week three phone calls came in amazing succession. The first was from the Washington firm; I told them I was not their man, to call somebody else. As I hung up the phone my false self was screaming what are you doing! The next day the phone rang again; it was my wife, telling me that the university had called wanting to know where my first tuition installment was. On the third day a call came from a longtime friend who had been praying for me and my decision. "We think you ought to go to school," he said. "And we want to pay your way."

"Two roads diverged in a wood and I, I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference."

Where would we be today if Abraham had carefully weighed the pros and cons of God's invitation and decided that he'd rather hang on to his medical benefits, three weeks paid vacation and retirement plan in Ur? What would have happened if Moses had listened to his mother's advice to "never play with matches" and lived a careful, cautious life steering clear of all burning bushes? You wouldn't have the gospel if Paul had concluded that the life of a Pharisee, while not everything a man dreams for, was at least predictable and certainly more stable than following a voice he heard on the Damascus road. After all, people hear voices all the time and who really knows whether it's God or just one's imagination. Where would we be if Jesus, was not fierce and wild and romantic to the core? Come to think of it, we wouldn't be at all if God hadn't taken that enormous risk of us in the first place.

Most men spend the energy of their lives trying to eliminate risk, or squeezing it down to a more manageable size. Their children hear "no" far more than they hear "yes"; their employees feel chained up and their wives are equally bound. If it works, if a man succeeds in securing his life against all risk, he'll wind up in a cocoon of self-protection and wonder all the while why he's suffocating. If it doesn't work, he curses God, redoubles his efforts and his blood pressure. When you look at, the structure of the false self men tend to create, it always revolves around two themes: seizing upon some sort of competence and rejecting anything that cannot be controlled.

As David Whyte says, "The price of our vitality is the sum of all our fears"...Whyte talks about the difference between the false self's desire "to have power over experience, to control all events and consequences, and the soul's wish to have power through experience, no matter what that may be." You literally sacrifice your soul and your true power when you insist on controlling things, like the guy Jesus talked about who thought he finally pulled it all off, built himself some really nice barns and died the same night. "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36 NKJV). You can lose your soul, by the way, long before you die...

Too many men forsake their dreams because they aren't willing to risk, or fear they aren't up to the challenge, or are never told that those desires deep in their heart are good. But the soul of a man, the real gold Little refers to, isn't made for controlling things; it's made for adventure. Something in us remembers, however faintly, that
when God set man on the earth He gave us an incredible mission - a charter to explore, build, conquer, and care for all creation. It was a blank page waiting to be written; a clean canvas waiting to be painted. Well, sir, God never revoked that charter. It's still there, waiting for a man to seize it.

If you had permission to do what you really want to do, what would you do? Don't ask how; that will cut your desire off at the knees. How is never the right question; how is a faithless question. It means "unless I can see my way clearly I won't believe it, won't venture forth." When the angel told Zechariah that his ancient wife would bear him a son named John, Zechariah asked how and was struck dumb for it. How is God's department. He is asking you what.

What is written in your heart? What makes you come alive? If you could do what you've always wanted to do, what would it be? You see, a man's calling is written on his true heart, and he discovers it when he enters the frontier of his deep desires. To paraphrase Bailie, don't ask yourself what the world needs, ask yourself what makes you come alive because what the world needs are men who have come alive (p.200-206)...

The only way to live in this adventure - with all its danger and unpredictability and immensely high stakes - is in an ongoing, intimate relationship with God. The control we so desperately crave is an illusion. Far better to give it up in exchange for God's offer of companionship, set aside stale formulas so that we might enter into an informal friendship. Abraham knew this Moses did as well. Read through the first several chapters of Exodus - it's filled with a give-and-take between Moses and God. "Then the Lord said to Moses," "then Moses said to the Lord." The two act like they know each other, like they really are intimate allies. David - a man after God's own heart - also walked and warred and loved his way through life in a conversational intimacy with God (p.214).

Summary

To conclude with let's summarize some of the points about God's nature, His personality and His emotions that we've discovered in our exploration of His Word:

- When God made man in His own image (Genesis 1:26), He gave us the ability to have the same basic emotions that He has – the ability to laugh when we are happy, to cry when we are sad, to become angry when things go wrong, to be jealous when someone is unfaithful and to love when we are loved.

- God is Creator (Genesis 1) of everything in the vast Universe - the stars, the galaxies in endless space, this earth, man, and everything in the earth. That is what God is - what He does for a living. He creates! He designs, forms, and shapes. He gives life! He is the great giver. And His law - His way of life - is the way of giving, not getting which is the way of this world.

- God the Father is Creator. But he "created all things by Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:9). He loves to share the creation of things in this universe with His Son.

- Not only is God's power and His love truly awesome, so too is His creativity (Romans. 1:20). Most people focus on God's all-powerful and all-loving nature but His infinite creativity is often overlooked. One of God's remarkable personality traits is that He really goes out of His way to express His infinite creativity. We see it in how He continues to shower snowflakes all around the world, of which no two have every been found to be alike. Look at all the incredible variety in the plant and animal kingdoms.
- A newly married couple at some stage usually find that they want to share the wonderful life that they have together with children of their own and so begin to have children. Likewise God wanted to share the wonderful life that He has and can offer to others with children of His own. God wanted to have beings with different viewpoints and experiences to share their company with. God the Father and Jesus Christ wanted to fellowship and work together with a diversity of beings at their own level of God existence and so began the great plan of God TO REPRODUCE HIMSELF! (Genesis 1:26).

- As painful as it would be for mankind, God's decision to allow Satan to stay and tempt mankind for 6,000 years would deepen the contrast between God's way of life and the way of sin. It would allow the worst of humanity to display itself and build up the FULL range of sin and wrong experience to prove for the rest of eternity that sin hurts. A period of 6,000 years is nothing compared to the rest of eternity.

- When Paul talked about Israel when they came out Egypt under Moses he said: "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus Christ was the member of the God family who dealt personally with Israel in the Old Testament and was the one who appeared to Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments. Most references to God in the Old Testament that describe His emotions, His reactions and personality are referring to the God being who became Jesus Christ.

- God the Father and the Son are very similar in most respects (John 14:7-9, Hebrews 1:1-3). They certainly have the same perfect loving character. They would react very similar to each other and no doubt their emotions and personality traits would be very similar.

- God is the original Renaissance man – the creator and originator of all the different talents and abilities, both impressive and unusual we see exhibited throughout the whole human race. Our personalities are usually an expression of the few talents and abilities that we have. God has all those talents and abilities and is able to be "all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9:22) and easily relate to everybody, a gift that eludes many of us because of our limited talents and personalities.

- Sometimes we tend to think of God as sitting up in heaven in front of a bank of TV sets seeing and knowing everything that we do. Genesis 18:20-21 says that God went down to see if Sodom and Gomorrah was as bad as He had heard, presumably from the angels who observe what's going on around the world and report back to God (Zechariah 4:10). He didn't know automatically. Even though he could know automatically if He wanted to, He chose to have it reported to Him. Then, rather than viewing how bad the cities were on a screen in heaven He chose to make a personal visit and see what it was like for Himself.

- God has a very strong stance against sacrilege seen in the death penalty for breaking the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36), eating leaven during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:19) and eating on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:29).

- The way that God teaches us His way of life in the Bible is much the same way. We, like the Israelites when they came out of Egypt, are like spiritual infants when we first start to learn about God's way of life. The Ten Commandments are mostly specific actions where God tells us not to do certain things. The statutes and the judgments again mostly deal with specific actions rather than principles and there is more of a balance between positive actions and negative ones. When we get to the New Testament most of the new teaching introduced about God's way of life focuses on attitudes like the fruits of God's spirit and the principles behind the laws of God.

- God describes Himself using a powerful emotion – He calls Himself a jealous God (Exodus 20:3-5). What we would call godly jealousy could best be defined as an intolerance to unfaithfulness.
God shows great passion in His anger towards those who would take advantage of people that are less fortunate. He has great concern for the little people, unlike many who rule nations and even church organizations at times (Exodus 23:24, Matthew 18:1-6).

God is not partial or racist (Romans 2:11, James 2:1-9). He is completely fair in the way He administers justice balancing that justice with mercy. He loves the stranger (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). We should show love and concern for those amongst us who are strangers. God loves generosity of spirit and a willingness on our part to help the poor.

God gave the Levites no land inheritance (Deuteronomy 18:1-2). This shows that God understands the need for checks and balances when you are dealing fallible humans who are given power and authority. There is a similar example of Jesus spreading the balance of power with those who would lead His church in the New Testament era by appointing twelve apostles, not one apostle and eleven evangelists.

God is present and active among His people. The whole Old Testament testifies that God is active, that He calls, leads, and empowers His people. God is presented as Lord over the history of all peoples. Nations are presented as instruments by which God accomplishes his purpose, as when Assyria is used to punish Israel (Isaiah 10:5-11) or when the Persian king, Cyrus, is raised to deliver them (Isaiah 44:28-45:13).

The God of the Bible is a hidden God (Isaiah 45:15). Why does God remain hidden, No doubt, one reason is that God's holiness is too great for humans to endure. Another reason may be that for God to have authentic relations with people, there must be freedom; if God forces himself on us by overwhelming acts, then we are compelled into a relationship with him. God does not coerce; he invites. To preserve human freedom he will even let people do the opposite of His desires and even let them abuse others. Because of human free will, God has chosen to veil his presence. He does not want automatons.

Some might accuse God of being violent, impatient and unmerciful by wanting to kill all of Israel on certain occasions when they severely provoked His with their unfaithfulness but we need to remember God’s long-term perspective. God "kills and makes alive" (1 Samuel 2:6). He has the power over life and death. He can kill people and hand out the death penalty for sins but He can and will resurrect them in the second resurrection for their first true opportunity at salvation. In one sense His actions could be considered a merciful thing to do. Rather than continue their immoral path they would, in the next second of their consciousness, come up in the second resurrection (Ezekiel 37:1-14, Revelation 20:5).

God is willing to change His mind and do things our way if we boldly make our case to Him (Exodus 32:7-14). There’s usually more than one path to achieve God’s overall plan. God’s will is important but He also wants to know our will and what we want. If we want to go a different path to the same overall goal, God will often be willing to change His mind if it is that important to us and we show the right attitude in approaching Him.

For all His incredible power God prefers to be known for His perfect character and the great love He has for His people. In Exodus 34:5-7 when He allowed Moses to see Him in His glorified state we read: "Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty".

God says in Leviticus 26:3-12 that if Israel obeyed Him that He would set up His tabernacle among them and walk among them. His tabernacle and later the Temple of God was amongst them. Did Jesus as the Word of God literally walk among them? He appeared on a number of occasions to a number of God's servants. Invisible, for the most part, it appears likely that He often did walk among them in His
spirit form. Ultimately the Father yearns to do the same thing, something that will happen for the first time when the New Jerusalem descends to the earth.

- Before revealing the angel in his way to Balaam God indulged in a little humour by making his donkey (the original Mr Ed) speak to him the words the donkey may well have said if it was a sentient being (Numbers 22:21-35). Another occasion that showed Jesus’ sense of humour was after His resurrection when He had a little fun and tom foolery by hiding His identity from His disciples and disappearing right at the moment He opened the veil from their eyes when they finally recognized Him (Luke 24:13-27).

- God had a deep yearning for Israel to obey Him and for life to go well for them (Deuteronomy 5:29). God knew though that Israel would break their covenant. He knew the inclination of their heart and that they lacked the moral strength to faithfully throughout all their generations. With every advantage that God could possibly given them, short of His Holy Spirit, they would be God's guinea pig to the rest of the world to teach humanity the lesson that only through the power of His Holy Spirit could they truly obey Him.

- God has a deep feeling and yearning for His people (Jeremiah 31:20). When you have a personal investment in people it hurts when they turn away. You long for a wayward child but you realize that you have to let them make their own mistakes for a while.

- Israel forgot what God had done to her and was unfaithful in every way – forsaking God and His ways and worshipping all the pagan gods around her. One of the sins which most horrified God was sacrificing their children and burning them with fire to please foreign gods like Molech. “Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be
devoured” (Ezekiel 16:20-21). God reminds them that the children that they bore were also His and He ached that Israel would kill His children like that.

- God macro-manages the affairs of the world. For the most part He keeps His hands off this world but allows and sometimes work things out so certain good or bad rulers get into power to teach various nations lessons and to fulfil certain prophecies instrumental in His master plan for mankind (Daniel 2:21).

- In the book of Job it begins with a peek into the goings on at God’s heavenly throne and we find that God allows Satan to just waltz up to His throne and have an audience with Him (Job 1). We also learn that God controls how much power Satan has.

- In all the great vast universe we are like little ants yet God takes a personal interest in us. All this universe around us was created for us (Psalm 8).

- God is near to those of a broken heart (Psalm 34:18). He sees our pain and wants to be there for us and help us out, especially when we realize our carnal way doesn’t work and we want to really change and do things His way.

- Psalm 50 God tells us that He’s not mainly interested in religious ceremony but is interested in us living according to His law and loving our fellow neighbour. God keeps silent at times and does nothing but that doesn’t mean He approves of our ways when we sin. He hates religious hypocrisy and wants us to order our conduct aright.

- When we truly repent with a right heart God is rich in mercy and will forgive us of those sins (Psalm 103:3). Jesus Christ's sacrifice covers ALL our of sins. We may have a hard time believing God will forgive us of certain very bad sins but we cannot limit Christ's sacrifice by thinking He cannot forgive certain really bad sins that we have committed.

- The death of a christian is a precious moment to God because in that moment they've made it (Psalm 116:15).

- Prophets sometimes became quite dramatic and acted out their messages. God asked them to do some strange things at times, some of which God had barred them do normally but made an exception in order to emphasize certain lessons to His people. God had Isaiah walk around naked for three years (Isaiah 20:3) and told Hosea to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1:2).

- Isaiah 14:13 says that God’s throne is “on the farthest sides of the north”. This tends to indicate that God’s throne in heaven is somewhere around the north celestial pole.

- God thinks so differently than we do (Isaiah 55:8). He can see things far off that we can’t. Often God doesn’t make sense to us but He sees dangers and opportunities that we can’t see which gives God such a greater perspective. God likes to surprise us and do things differently to emphasise His greatness so that it will keep us humble and reliant on Him.

- God’s hand is not shortened (Isaiah 59:1-2). He really is almighty and CAN do truly anything in seemingly impossible situations. It can often be our sins which can separate us from God at times and limit God’s intervention. We can limit Him with either a lack of faith and or a lack of obedience. At other times God will say no, not because we lack faith or obedience, but because He sees dangers for us if we had what we asked for or He might see a better opportunity on the horizon than the one we have asked for. Some of God’s best gifts are unanswered prayer.
- God appreciates those who are contrite and tremble at His word *(Isaiah 66:2)*. Those who are moved by what He has to say and are conscientious and deeply revere Him are looked highly upon by God.

- We should glory and be excited about knowing God and developing His righteousness. God delights in us understanding who He is and that He is a good and kind God *(Jeremiah 9:23-24)*.

- God loves us all when most of us don’t love back so God *(Romans 5:8)* willingly takes on the risk of emotional hurt when He invests so much of Himself in doing good to us and building a relationship with us.

- God deserves the best not the leftovers which the people and the priests were offering to God *(Malachi 1:7-8)*. Would we not be very respectful and give our best in attitude and gifts towards a great king or queen like the Queen of England for example? If so, is not God so much greater and more worthy of honour, reverence and the very best of what we have to give?

- Because God is consistent in the love and mercy that He shows us and that He is not temperamental and moody we, therefore, are not consumed *(Malachi 3:6)*. God has great mercy.

- There is a book of remembrance for those who fear God and love getting together and talking about His truth and way of life *(Malachi 3:16-17)*. God treasures those who love and obey Him like precious jewels and He will protect them at the time of trouble soon to come upon the whole world.

- While Christ did travel around a fair bit during His ministry he also had a home and lived amongst the people in Capernaum along the beautiful shoreline of Lake Galilee *(Mark 2:1)*. People could come to Him and see how He lived in a typical home environment.

- When God reciprocates He will often give over and above what we expect *(Luke 6:38)*. God takes great delight in giving when spiritually for our benefit it is fitting to do so.

- We see in the example of David and the showbread that Jesus quoted that God is not inflexible with the Sabbath and ceremonial laws of God like the Pharisees were when genuine human need was at stake *(Mark 2:25-28)*.

- God knows us very intimately, even better than we know ourselves *(Matthew 10:29-30)*. He is fully aware of the troubles and problems that we go through and He yearns to have a relationship with us and help us where He can within His great plan. He really is intensely interested in our lives and even with the little things we might not think to bother Him by. God tells us not to worry and that we have His promise that He will always provide for our needs (not always our wants though) if we seek Him and His righteousness FIRST ahead of everything else *(Matthew 6:25-33)*.


- Jesus was happy to mingle with ordinary everyday people as showed care and concern and a willingness to associate with those that society tends to reject *(Matthew 9:10-13)*.

- There are two major pains in life – the pain of discipline and the pain of regret. Jesus wants us to be willing to take on the lighter pain of disciplining ourselves to live His way so we don’t have to deal with the much greater pain of regret and the consequences of our sins. God’s way is much easier in the long run *(Matthew 11:28-29)*.
- To test the attitude of those who were following Him at the time, Jesus was deliberately provocative in His teaching about Passover and developing the mind and character of Christ (John 6).

- Jesus had great feeling and compassion for the people and He displayed an important Christian quality – that of hospitality. He showed a willingness to be a good host and provide a good meal for them (Matthew 14:14-21).

- Jesus was totally focused on the need to go through short-term pain to achieve long term good (Matthew 16:21-24). The short-term pain of the crucifixion would be indescribable agony yet the long term good it would achieve for the rest of eternity would be even greater.

- There are only three occasions where human beings have audibly heard God the Father speak. One was at Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:16-17). The second was at the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-9). His message was the same in both cases – “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” Two of the most important things the Father wanted to convey was just how much He loved His Son, Jesus Christ, and that He wanted people to hear and obey the words He had to say. In John 12:27-28 we read: “Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I came to this hour. ‘Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.’” This was to encourage the people to believe that He had sent Jesus (John 12:30). The same purpose was behind the other two occasions at Jesus’ baptism and the transfiguration.

- God yearns for everyone to be saved and He is not willing that ANY should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He is not content that He has saved most people. He will go out of His way to help anyone who has lost their way – so great is His love for each and every one of us (Luke 15:4-7).

- Jesus went out of His way to give praise and appreciation for acts of kindness that people did (Matthew 8:5-13).

- God takes it very personally the way we treat others, no matter how lowly and insignificant they are to others in society. This matter of hospitality and whether we do good to others or not is a major litmus test that God uses to determine if we fit to enter into His kingdom (Matthew 25:32-46).

- Jesus in many of his discussions used a lot of very simple child-like phrases and concepts, a style that was copied by arguably His best friend on earth during His ministry, the Apostle John (John 21:20), in his epistles. We see a lot of this style used by Jesus in John 7 and 8.

- Many of the Old Testament prophecies have an element of this in being quite cryptic at times. God wants us to use our minds and stretch ourselves to do the best that we can and learn from His word. The Bible’s consistency and balance points to one Divine author who conveyed His instruction manual to mankind through the different styles and personalities of different writers who were inspired by God’s spirit.

- God certainly has a penchant for using prose and poetry throughout His word. God also knows the power of a good story. God has started His book, the Bible, with some of the most powerful stories ever told. From the poetic elegance of the Creation account to the mighty deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt by the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea God knows how to impress lessons on us with great stories.

- God guides the nations and races to their inheritance (Acts 17:26). God has also appointed their times to migrate to their lands and times to come to dominate in this world at a sub-conscious level. Most peoples and races have had periods of time when they dominated and had great empires from Assyria, Babylon and Rome to the Mongolian, Spanish and British empires.
The church started with physical Israelites and then God began to call Gentiles \textbf{(Romans 1:16)}. God's punishment will come first on Israel and then on the Gentiles \textbf{(Isaiah 10:5-12)}. After Christ returns God will first work with physical Israel and offer them the chance to be spiritual Israelites \textbf{(Ezekiel 20:34-36)} and then, through their example when they do repent, God will open up salvation to the Gentile nations.

God's way is different from the way that we might have done things if we were God calling out a people now. He has deliberately chosen to call the "foolish" of the world so that no flesh should glory \textbf{(1 Corinthians 1:26-29)}. To confound the wise later on He chooses to use the "fools" of this world to do His Work that no flesh should glory and take the credit for the great plan God is working out here through mankind. In one sense when others are called later on they will be able to say that if so and so made it then anyone can make it into God's kingdom.

God knows our hearts and how much we truly are able to bear \textbf{(1 Corinthians 10:13)}. God will often appear to make no sense and is not obliged to tell us why he lets us go trials. We may not find out for years or even decades but God is always working out what is best for us and our character.

God is not a God of confusion but of order \textbf{(1 Corinthians 14:33, 40)}. He likes things done decently and in order and He likes His surroundings to be pleasant and tidy.

God is a God of comfort \textbf{(2 Corinthians 1:3-7)} He feels for what we go through and yearns to help comfort us when we go through problems in life. In his far-sighted wisdom He sometimes allows us go through severe and different trials at times. Many problems in life Jesus never personally experienced (eg. rape or drug addiction, etc.). He often calls people who have been through all sorts of different and terrible trials so that the "sufferings of Christ abound in us" and so they can better empathize and help those we have to deal with when they are called later on.

The earth and the heavenly order will be entirely re-decorated \textbf{(Revelation 21-22)}. Finally God the Father will come and dwell with all mankind. Up until this time no human has had any direct contact with the Father. Jesus Christ has been the mediator between the Father and mankind. Why has God the Father chosen to wait until this time to have direct contact with mankind? I suspect it is to emphasize the great lesson that sin is utterly repugnant to God and God the Father in His great holiness has chosen to wait until sin has been purged from this planet which will become the new headquarters of the universe.

God's great Master plan is truly amazing and shows the profound depths of His love. A friend of mine calls this plan of salvation \textbf{(Hebrews 2:8-10)}, where God plans to bring us lowly dust of the ground into His Family, as the "Clod to God Program".

There are two more items that I'd like to quote from to complete this summary of God's personality and emotions. The first is an article entitled "Does Man Have God's Emotions?" that appeared in January 1986 Good News (p.12).

God's purpose in creating human life is to reproduce Himself by adding spirit-born children to His Family \textbf{(John 3:3, 6, 8)}. When God made us in His own image, He gave us the potential for the same basic emotions He Himself possesses: the ability to laugh when we are happy, to cry when sad, to become angry when sins mount, to be jealous when someone is unfaithful, to feel indignation when things are wrong and to love when we are loved.

Emotions are good: They give life its color and zest. The difference between us and God is that God controls His emotions, whereas, all too often, our emotions control us.
One major purpose God had in mind in creating us as humans subject to death, before giving us everlasting life as spirit beings, is to teach us to control our emotions. Obeying the Ten Commandments and keeping all the other laws God gave us is often little more than exercising proper control over our emotions - which, in turn, control our drives and actions.

God's strongest emotion is love. He is love (1 John 4:8, 16). His every action is based upon love. God's whole philosophy is sharing Himself, along with everything in the universe, with those He loves.

Man's greatest emotion is also love, but man has perverted his love and turned it inward, following the "get" philosophy rather than God's "give" philosophy. Even the highest forms of human love, such as the love of a mother for her child, are based on concern and care for one's extended self.

We love God because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). The greatest commandment is that we love God with all our heart, mind and strength. The second greatest commandment is that we love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31).

Hatred is the opposite of love and God also expresses hatred. Solomon tells us there is a time to hate (Ecclesiastes 3:8). God hates evil and every manifestation of it - pride, deceit, violence, selfishness (Psalm 5:5-6, 11:5, 45:7).


Anger is not an emotion we must stifle and never use. God tells us there are times when we should be angry, but we should never let anger lead us to sin (Ephesians 4:26).

Fear is also an emotion God expresses, but not in the way humans fear. The wrong type of fear - faithlessness, paranoia and mere fear of punishment because we have sinned, for example will keep us out of God's Kingdom (Revelation 21:8).

God cannot sin because He wlls not to sin. In that sense He fears to do wrong or cause wrong consequences. This is a right emotion we should possess (2 Samuel 1:14). The human fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10). God has pleasure in those who fear Him (Psalm 147:11).

God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 4:24). One of Hi names is Jealous (Exodus 34:14). The first two of the Ten Commandments forbid idolatry and express God's intolerance of unfaithfulness, which is what godly jealousy is. The Seventh Commandment states His intolerance of unfaithfulness to a marriage partner (Exodus 20:3-6, 14).

One of Elijah's strongest attributes was that he was jealous for God (1 Kings 19:10). Jealousy has its right place among our emotions (2 Corinthians 11:2). When rightly applied, it should provoke us to good works (Romans 11:11). The spirit of jealousy should never be competitive, but protective (Song of Solomon 8:6).

God expresses grief (Genesis 6:6, Psalm 78:40, Hebrews 3:10); Jesus Himself wept (John 11:35). God expresses supreme joy (Matthew 25:21, 23, Luke 15:10,
He experiences indignation (Isaiah 34:2) and He knows sorrow (Isaiah 53:3). "Godly sorrow," says 2 Corinthians 7:10, "produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." God feels concern (Deuteronomy 5:29), exercises patience and offers comfort (Romans 15:5, 2 Peter 3:9).

God is humble and merciful, passive at times, vengeful at other times, but, above all, always in control of His emotions, as we should be, using them properly and for positive, right purposes. God always radiates the wonderful fruits of His Spirit, chief of which are love, joy and peace (Galatians 5:22-23).

Ronald Wlogyga adds to that and gives this wonderful description of what God's character and personality is really like:

"God is Holy (Psalm 99:9). The word 'Holy' means pure of heart or free from sin. God is Spirit (John 4:24). Since God is composed of spirit and has this 'holy' attitude, it is correct to call God a 'Holy Spirit.' God is love (1 John 4:8). Love is a giving attitude, rather than a getting attitude. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18). God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy (Psalm 103:8). God looks not on the outward appearance, but on the heart or attitude of a person (1 Samuel 16:7). God forgives all our iniquities, and heals our diseases (Psalm 103:3).

"God's power and understanding is infinite (Psalm 147:4-5)...God calls the stars by their names (Psalm 147:43). God knows the number of hairs on your head (Matthew 10:30). God knows the number of steps you take (Job 14:16, 31:4). With God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).


"God gets angry (Psalm 7:11). Seven things the Lord hates: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a wicked heart, mischievous feet, a false witness that lies, he that sows discord among brethren (Proverbs 6:16-19).

"God says the whole earth is His (Exodus 19:5, Job 41:10). God owns all the gold and silver (Haggai 2:8). God sets up the bounds of nations (Acts 17:26, Deuteronomy 32:7-8). God gives His Kingdom to whomsoever He will (Daniel 2:20-21, 4:17, 25)...God makes judges fools, sets up kings and removes, overthrows the mighty, takes away understanding from the aged, weakens the mighty, increases and destroys nations (Job 12:9-25)...God is responsible for the deaf, dumb, and blind (Exodus 4:11). God determines the outcome of wars (Psalm 33)..."

"God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). God can change His mind. Abraham talked God out of destroying all the righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20-33). Moses talked God out of destroying all of Israel (Exodus 32). God changed His mind about King Hezekiah because he prayed and granted 15 years to his life (2 Kings 20:1-6).
"God works in mysterious ways. God sent Joseph into slavery to preserve Israel during a famine (Genesis 45:5). The secret things belong to God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us (Deuteronomy 29:29). Every good and perfect gift is from God above (James 1:17). God will finish His creation that He started (Philippians 1:3 and Psalm 138:8).

“God cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). God will not fail, nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6). Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him (Psalm 103:13). God is our comforter (2 Corinthians 7:6). God loves us (1 John 4:19). He wants to save the whole world (John 3:16-17). God is not willing that any should perish (1 Timothy 2:1-4)” (The Ultimate Source of All Supernatural Phenomena, p.191-192).

Our God truly is an awesome God! He is a God of almighty power, infinite wisdom, amazing creativity, perfect love and He is an emotional God who truly cares for each and every one of us and yearns for us to reach our incredible human potential as sons and daughters in His eternal Family.